TEACHER EFFICACY FOR MENTORING PRE-SERVICE CANDIDATES IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

by

XERNONA JACKSON THOMAS

(Under the Direction of Karen Bryant)

ABSTRACT

This action research case study sought to improve mentoring experiences of teachers by examining correlations between mentor teacher efficacy and mentor preparation and engagement. Fredrick Brown Elementary School is in a professional development school partnership with a local university and serves as a host site for over seventy pre-service teachers annually. Due to the large number of teacher candidates needing placement, all Fredrick Brown teachers with three or more years of experience are required to serve as mentor teachers. Despite the many benefits of hosting pre-service teachers, classroom teachers are sometimes apprehensive regarding student placements. This reluctance to mentor has the potential to negatively impact the organizational commitment of teachers. A possible factor contributing to teacher apprehension toward mentoring is lack of efficacy in this area due to the absence of mentor teacher training and ongoing support. Three research questions guided this study:

- What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?

- What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?
- In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teachers' efficacy as mentors?

Action research was used as the methodology to identify barriers to mentor commitment and to explore effective supports for teachers in their role as mentor. Findings indicated that mentoring instills a sense of reflection and professional accountability for exemplary practice. Data also suggested that teacher confidence with critical conversations can hinder mentoring relationships. However, the community of practice model of professional learning proved to be a successful mechanism for addressing identified barriers and increasing teacher efficacy for mentoring.

INDEX WORDS: action research case study, mentor teacher efficacy, mentoring pre-service candidates, professional development school

TEACHER EFFICACY FOR MENTORING PRE-SERVICE CANDIDATES IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

by

XERNONA JACKSON THOMAS

ABJ, The University of Georgia, 1991

MSW, The University of Georgia, 1992

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017

TEACHER EFFICACY FOR MENTORING PRE-SERVICE CANDIDATES IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

by

XERNONA JACKSON THOMAS

Major Professor:	Karen Bryant
Committee:	Sheneka Williams
	Elizabeth DeBray
	Richard Welsh

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2017

DEDICATION

To

Reginald Thomas, my husband and best friend.

Thank you for your love, support and encouragement during my doctoral studies and professional career. You have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and have prayed daily for my success. You never doubted that I could accomplish this task and you believed in me even when I did not have the energy to believe in myself. I thank God for creating you just for me! I love you.

Jameson Douglas, my first born. You have endured many years of my educational advancement and personally sacrificed for me to achieve my professional goals. Your smile and simple "mommy, I love you" have given me the motivation to carry on. The red birds will continue to inspire you as they have me as you continue to seek God's direction for your life. I love you to the moon and back!

Camille Faith, my daughter and my source of encouragement. You have been by my side every day encouraging me to keep going when I wanted to give up. You wrote your papers while I wrote mine. You offered your thoughts on my topic and on my presentations. You gave your opinion, even when it was not solicited! Your personal fortitude in the midst of many challenges has provided me with determination needed to press on. I love you!

My amazing mother, Freddie Jackson. You taught me to reach for the stars, but to keep my feet on the ground. I finally took those education courses that you suggested over

twenty years ago. Throughout all of my life you have believed in me and encouraged me to fulfill my dreams. You sacrificed daily so that all of my needs and most of my wants were met. Your daily prayers have carried me. Thank you for being an amazing mother. The memory of my father, Amos Jackson, Jr. and my beloved grandparents, Fred and Susie Brown. I have felt your love and presence daily. Papa, you instilled in me the confidence needed to sit among university presidents and custodians and feel confident in either place. You all taught me the value of faith in God, a love for family, a solid education and a desire to succeed. I am because of who each of you were.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God Be the Glory! Proverbs 16:3 promises: “Commit your actions to the Lord and your plans will succeed”. I began this journey trusting in you to finish it. You have shown yourself mighty and ever present from the beginning to this moment of completion. I thank you God! I walked daily knowing that the will of God would not take me where the grace of God would not sustain me. From the moment that you sent a program in my hometown, to guidance about a dissertation topic, to words that completed my thoughts, I thank you. Thank you for your constant peace, strength, hope and joy. But God!

Thank you to my in-laws, Eugene and Dorothy Thomas, for your love and support throughout my personal and professional endeavors.

Thank you to the members of my doctoral advisory committee: Drs. Karen Byrant, Sheneka Willaims, Elizabeth DeBray and Richard Welsh; A special word of gratitude to Dr. Karen Bryant (major professor) and Dr. Sheneka Williams for your guidance, feedback and encouragement during my doctoral studies. Your optimism and wisdom provided a source of strength during the last three years.

I would also like to thank my peers in Cohort 2 at the University of Georgia. Your friendship and support made the journey not only achievable, but enjoyable.

I want to thank the teachers of JJ Harris who graciously gave of their time, thoughts and encouragement as members of my action research team. This dissertation would not have been possible without the open and reflective participation of each of

you. Thank you also to Drs. Dresden, Capuozzo, Cervero, Thompson and Garrett for your work in developing the interventions for this research project. The contributions of all of you have been invaluable.

In addition, I want to thank my entire school family for your patience and encouragement during the last three years. A special thank you to my administrative team, Beverly, Melissa, and Scott, for your tolerance and support during this journey.

Lastly, thank you to my church family, Chestnut Grove Baptist, for your constant prayers. I have been strengthened by the supplications of each of you. Specifically, thank you to Pam and Adrienne for serving as surrogate parents while I attended class. You both made it much easier for me to focus on coursework without worrying about my mom responsibilities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I spent my first ten years in education as a school social worker serving students and families in two counties. After spending four years as an administrator in a neighboring county, I was afforded the opportunity to open a new local education agency (LEA) charter school with a focus on developing a professional development school (PDS) partnership with a local university. The partnership was intriguing, as it offered the opportunity to design a program that was mutually beneficial for our school and the university. Members of the school district administration and university faculty wanted to explore the option of placing cohorts of pre-service candidates at our school for an entire year. The goal was to implement a model similar to medical schools where teacher candidates could work intensely alongside professionals in the field. In addition, these pre-service candidates could engage in observation of best practices and then engage in conversations with the teachers about how and why they chose the strategies that they did.

As principal of the school, I was challenged with working collaboratively with university faculty to develop a successful model that supported the academic growth of our students, professional development of our teachers, and preparation of university teacher candidates. Additionally, my role as principal allowed me to receive regular feedback from teachers on the benefits and challenges of the partnership. It was the content of these conversations that led me to recognize the necessity of better

understanding the needs of mentor teachers and to assess the current level of mentor professional learning.

Description of the Context

Understanding the context of this action research study was critical to comprehending the professional learning needs of teachers at Fredrick Brown Elementary.[1] According to Stake (2006), "Each case to be studied is a complex entity located in its own situation" (p. 12). By exploring the social, cultural and historical contexts of the school, the reader is better able to grasp the unique needs of teachers who work within a professional development school setting. As a qualitative research study, it is imperative that situational details paint a vivid picture of the case context so that others can make appropriate correlations to their own work (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006).

Fredrick Brown Elementary School is Central School District's most recently established campus. Opening in 2009, the school was the district's first charter initiative, with focuses on schoolwide enrichment, dual language, and a professional development schools partnership with Faith Central University. All of the charter components were innovative practices for Central School District and required much planning and professional learning for administrators and teachers.

In addition to the unique programs offered at Fredrick Brown, the school also served the district's highest numbers of English Language Learners. Fredrick Brown opened with 67% Hispanic and 27% percent African American students. In addition, over 95% of students received free or reduced lunch. The school is located in the northern quadrant of Means County, a college town, and is isolated from business and

[1] The names of the school and district are pseudonyms.

industry. There is no public transportation within walking distance of the school and no essential resources located within walking distance of families' homes.

When visitors come to Fredrick Brown for the first time, they find themselves traveling in a somewhat remote area of town. They may encounter a few basic businesses, such as two gas stations and a restaurant, as well as a fire department prior to arriving at the school. Housing in the area mostly consists of mobile homes and other small family structures. The school sits in an open field and seems slightly out of place for the area. Although the scene leading to the school lacks activity and industry, the climate quickly changes once visitors enter the building. The inside of Fredrick Brown is filled with energetic children and highly motivated adults. In the mornings, many parents—mostly fathers— walk their children into the building. The main hallway is staffed by many school faculty members who greet students and parents with smiles, hugs, and handshakes. Many of the conversations heard are in Spanish with limited, but enthusiastic, questions and responses by staff. The same warm greetings exist on the opposite side of the building, where a group of faculty gathers to welcome the bus riders to another great day of learning.

Once inside classrooms, students are surrounded by caring adults with high expectations for student learning. Each class is generally staffed by multiple certified teachers, including homeroom, ESOL, gifted, and EIP teachers, as well as pre-service teacher candidates. The expectation at Fredrick Brown is for students to receive rigorous, engaging instruction that is differentiated to meet their individualized learning needs. In addition, teachers make real world connections through integrated problem-based units. Many district administrators and other visitors have expressed amazement at the

controlled chaos of multiple adults in one classroom. They are equally impressed by the strong relationships that exist among adults and children, as evidenced by many verbal and nonverbal gestures of affirmation and excitement for learning. Fredrick Brown Elementary stands out among other schools for a variety of reasons. However, one of the most unique characteristics is tied to the professional development school relationship that exists between Fredrick Brown and Faith Central University. It is this relationship that helps to support the professional learning needs of the school and the need for multiple adults to work with small, differentiated groups of students. The school currently has 45 certified staff members whose teaching assignments range from pre-K through fifth grade. Seventy-six percent of teachers have at least one advanced degree, and the average number of years of teaching experience is ten. As a professional development school, Fredrick Brown serves approximately 80 pre-service candidates each year. These students range from third-year college students to those in their senior year. All teachers with three or more years of experience are required to supervise pre-service candidates every semester, and many have two students—one Block 3 and one Block 4—placed with them each time. Simon (2009) notes that "in one way or another all portrayals of individuals in case study research are about lived experience" (p. 75). It is the lived experiences of mentor teachers that serve as the basis for this action research study. As participant researcher, my aim is to increase the efficacy of mentor teachers by implementing professional learning that addresses the costs and hindrances of mentoring.

Problem Statement

Teachers who work PDS settings have the opportunity to contribute to the field of education through their mentoring of pre-service teachers. While there are multiple

benefits to hosting pre-service teachers, mentor motivation can be an area of challenge (Hudson & Hudson, 2010). In addition, a lack of formalized mentor preparation can negatively affect mentor willingness to serve in this capacity (Ambrosetti, 2012). The aim of this study was to improve mentoring experiences of teachers at Fredrick Brown Elementary by examining correlations between mentor teacher efficacy and mentor preparation and engagement. Fredrick Brown Elementary teachers recognize the benefits of serving as mentors to pre-service teachers. However, they also acknowledge that there are areas that could be improved to ensure that the experience is meaningful for all stakeholders.

Public secondary schools and higher education institutions have traditionally worked together in the area of teacher preparation. Universities have provided the formal theoretical training for those desiring to enter the field of education, while local schools have served as the practice ground for students to apply what they have learned in college to an authentic learning environment (Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner, 2013). Historically, K-12 schools have partnered with postsecondary institutions to place pre-service teachers with their strongest veteran teachers to serve as mentors for their learning.

A recent trend in educator preparation programs has been the implementation of PDS partnerships between local school districts and post-secondary institutions. While this model is not new to the field of education, this state only began to actively engage in these partnerships about ten years ago (J. Dresden & R. Capuozzo, personal communication, September 1, 2015). The gap between theory and practice has been an impetus for developing stronger connections between institutions of higher learning and public schools (Allen et al., 2013). The importance of such relationships is reiterated in

literature, as when Allen et al. (2013) note that "forging and fostering of school-university partnerships has been identified as one of the critical components in creating more powerful and more effective teacher education programs" (p. 109).

While the implementation of Professional Development School initiatives has seen significant benefit for universities and K-12 school faculty and students, there are challenges that accompany components of the model. From the perspective of the principal of a professional development school, one of the greatest obstacles relates to the placement of copious numbers of practicum students with quality mentors. Currently, two university-level courses are taught on site at Fredrick Brown Elementary School. Students who participate in these courses are also enrolled in a Block 3, two-days-per-week practicum experience. Faith Central University requests that all students who are assigned to university courses at Fredrick Brown Elementary School are also assigned to a practicum experience within the building. During a past semester, there were 21 Block 3 students who required placements. In addition, the expectation from the university level is that students are allowed to complete their Block 4, full-time practicum with the same teacher. This expectation resulted in 23 full time student teachers being assigned to Fredrick Brown Elementary.

Faith Central University refers to the Fredrick Brown model of professional development as a Level 4 program. A significant ramification of this model is that essentially all teachers are required to host one Block 3 and one Block 4 student every semester regardless of interest or skill set. This requirement directly conflicts with Hudson and Hudson's (2010) finding that it is important for "both the mentor and mentee [to want] the mentoring process" (p. 159). Their research also reinforces the negative

impact on the mentoring relationship when there is a lack of professional learning opportunities for mentors and a shortage of available quality mentors. Because there is little latitude within Fredrick Brown Elementary for choosing who will be designated as a mentor, school leaders are frequently faced with the challenge of responding to mentor and mentee pairing issues. In an effort to maintain collegial and productive relationships, leaders must develop formalized processes to better prepare all teachers to serve in a mentor capacity.

When choosing supervising teachers, many school leaders, university faculty, and public school educators make the erroneous assumption that recognition as an exemplary teacher automatically qualifies an educator to be an exemplary mentor. Research has found this belief to be false; however, findings suggest that strong teachers can be taught to be effective mentors (Ambrosetti, 2012; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011). Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley, and Smith (2012) posit that "mentoring of pre-service teachers does not automatically occur with the assignment of a student teacher with a cooperating teacher and the university supervisor" (p. 68). The contention of these authors directly correlates with the problem of practice under consideration. Placement at a practicum site does not guarantee that a pre-service student will receive the mentoring needed to develop into a reflective, successful teaching professional (O'Brian, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007). In addition, simply being given the title of mentor or supervising teacher does not guarantee the existence of a foundational understanding of what effective mentoring looks like (Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Rodgers & Keil, 2007). Research has shown that there are viable solutions to improve the quality of mentoring that occurs between teachers and pre-service students

(Ambrosetti, 2012; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Evertson & Smithey, 2001). Ambrosetti (2014) notes that "preparation for mentoring can assist in developing effective mentors" (p. 32).

Feedback sessions with Fredrick Brown Elementary mentor teachers and mentees have provided evidence for the need to address mentor preparation within the school and district. Teachers acknowledge the multiple benefits of hosting pre-service teachers. However, there has been a recurring theme of teachers feeling overburdened and frustrated with these relationships and the perceived lack of professional skills of mentees. After extensive conversations with stakeholders, it was determined that mentors avoid providing timely responses to concerns because of their lack of confidence and training in supervisory and mentor-related roles. Our professor in residence, who supervises student teachers in our school, has engaged in similar conversations with pre-service teachers and their mentors. His informal findings confirm the need for more extensive professional learning for mentors to better respond to mentee needs through improved understanding of roles (J. Dresden & R. Capuozzo, personal communication, September 1, 2015). Pre-service teachers have reported overall satisfaction with their placement at Fredrick Brown Elementary, but they have also confirmed the need for support with relationship conflicts and greater clarification on the structure and expectations of the placement.

Purpose and Research Questions

The objective of this research study was is to improve the mentoring experience for mentors and mentees by mitigating the costs and increasing the benefits associated with this role. Clarification of mentor roles and mitigation of inadequate preparation of

mentors are two primary strategies that the researcher offers as having an effect on the efficacy of mentors. The action research planning team recognizes the value of practicum students within the school and seeks professional learning and procedure improvements to support teachers in the expectations related to their role as mentors and to reduce the costs of serving in this capacity.

The action research team began by attempting to gain a common understanding of the issues that negatively influence teacher perceptions and motivation related to mentoring. The next phase will be to move beyond problem identification to identifying potential support solutions that can be developed and presented in the form of professional learning. Based on this research, improved processes and supports will be established to better prepare mentor teachers for mentoring and consequently increase efficacy for and satisfaction with the mentoring process. These changes should also result in better experiences for mentees and improved learning experiences for Fredrick Brown students.

The purpose of this action research was to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?
- What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?
- In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teacher efficacy as mentors?

Definition of Terms

Within the field of education, many terms are used interchangeably, and in some cases, the definitions can vary depending on the context. For the purposes of this research study, the following definitions will be employed in an effort to aid in understanding the key terminology guiding the project:

- "Pre-service candidate" refers to a teacher candidate within the final year of an educator preparation program. These students are placed for either two or five days a week to complete their supervised student teaching experience. The term "student teacher" is also used synonymously in the literature to describe such candidates.
- "Veteran teacher" refers to a teacher who has taught for a minimum of three years.
- "Mentor teacher" refers to a veteran educator who supervises a pre-service candidate within a K-12 school setting.
- "Mentor efficacy" in this study is based on a combination of efficacy research by Bandura and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, as well as mentor researcher Ambrosetti. Ambrosetti (2014) refers to the benefits of changed understanding and practices as a result of mentor preparation programs. Based on the above research, this study defines mentor efficacy as one's belief in his or her own ability to effectively accomplish the roles and responsibilities of mentoring.
- "Community of practice" is used to describe a group of professionals who share common work duties and responsibilities and who share related professional knowledge with each other. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that communities

of practice can occur naturally or they can be purposefully organized in order for members to learn more about a specific topic of interest. In the context of this study, the communities of practice model is used to help mentor teachers learn more about the roles, responsibilities, and skills needed to become more efficacious as mentors.

All of these terms were used throughout this action research study as the action research team sought to gain answers to the proposed research questions.

Conceptual Framework

Mentor teachers are given the task of contributing to the professional development of pre-service candidates while in the field. In order for teachers to be successful in this capacity, they must have the confidence and skills needed to assert themselves actively in the mentor role. Thus, the conceptual framework used to guide this research is based on understanding the strengthening of teacher efficacy within a community of practice professional learning setting. Teachers at Fredrick Brown Elementary have shared feedback with administrators regarding the challenges that they face within their roles as mentors. While Faith Central University faculty have designed annual training for mentors in the area of co-teaching, limited time has been devoted to helping mentors with other components of their position. The aim of Fredrick Brown and Faith Central University faculty is to improve the quality of mentor experiences for teachers and pre-service candidates.

This action research study is based on understanding the relationships between teacher efficacy and mentor engagement. Teacher efficacy, or one's confidence in his or her ability to accomplish a specific task, is assumed to directly impact a teacher's

eagerness to engage in mentor responsibilities (Bandura, 1977). As an individual feels greater competence and confidence through positive experiences, he or she is less likely to be intimidated by the responsibilities that accompany additional roles, such as mentoring. This action research examined the utilization of a community of practice model of professional learning in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of mentor roles and related processes that hold the potential to reduce barriers identified by teachers and improve their perceived efficacy. Based on Bandura's model of efficacy and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's model of teacher efficacy, the study focused on teacher mastery experiences and vicarious experiences as a means of influencing teacher professional confidence.

Project Design

The figure below outlines the conceptual framework that guided the action research project at Fredrick Brown Elementary. Using the theoretical framework of teacher efficacy and other research studies, the action research team began exploring the problem of practice by seeking to understand what supports were needed to enhance mentors' engagement with their role and the school's partnership with Faith Central University. The action research team's examination of mentor literature led to the determination that mentor efficacy was a necessity for commitment and engagement. The team then utilized mentor feedback gained during focus group settings to design professional learning aimed at increasing understanding of roles and skills needed to be effective mentors. The desired outcome was greater commitment to the professional development schools partnership because of increased mentor efficacy.

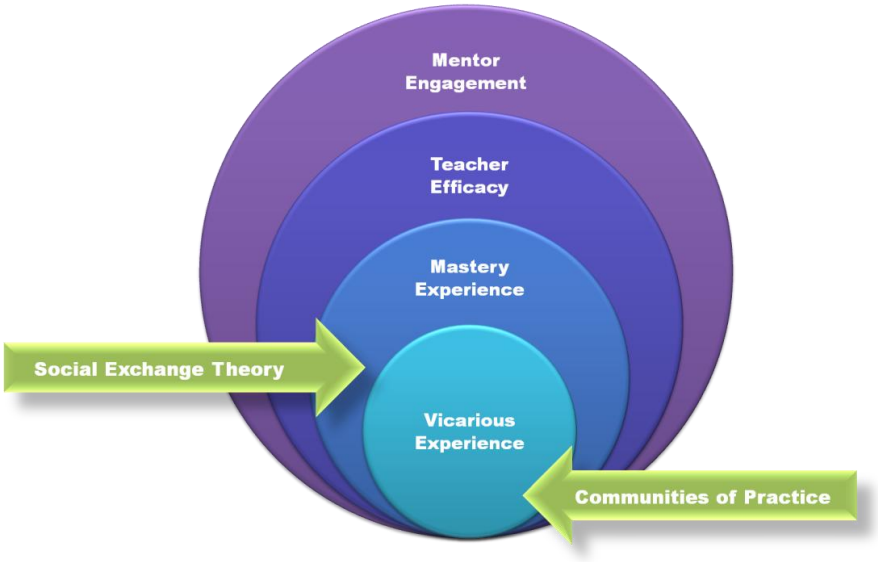

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Explanation of Model

The conceptual framework model represents the interrelated factors identified by the action research team. As explained by Bandura (1977) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), teacher efficacy is directly influenced by the experiences that teachers have observing others engaged in similar experiences and the success of their own personal experiences. This model suggests that teachers can increase their interactions with professionals who have experienced similar challenges and successes by participation in communities of practice. It is in these settings that teachers are able to share their experiences and offer suggestions to each other to overcome obstacles. Theoretical research for this study also supports the impact that perceived benefits and challenges of mentoring can have on teachers' personal mastery experiences. Positive vicarious and mastery experiences lead to greater teacher efficacy for and engagement with mentoring.

Methodology

While there is substantial research on the concept of mentoring pre-service teachers, the availability of studies on mentor preparation is not as expansive. Additionally, studies that add to the understanding of mentoring needs within the context of professional development schools is even more limited. In order to increase knowledge in this particular area of mentor education, case study was used as the method of research. Simons states that "the primary purpose for undertaking a case study is to explore the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case" (2009, p. 3). Previous studies with similar focuses provided a foundational understanding to guide the work of the action research team that addressed the problem of practice and questions for this study.

A team of leaders from Fredrick Brown Elementary and Faith Central University worked collaboratively to explore the needs of mentor teachers through reviews of literature, archival documents, and transcripts from meetings and focus groups. The team then developed professional learning modules that addressed the areas of need identified by mentor teachers. The action research intervention team, which consisted of mentor teachers, worked as co-constructors of the problem by participating in focus group discussions and adding to the sharing of knowledge in the community of practice professional learning sessions. At the conclusion of the study, I reviewed transcripts from each professional learning meeting as well as from individual interviews with each teacher participant and action research team meetings. Data gathered were used to assess teacher perceptions of their changes in efficacy for mentoring after completing professional learning.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature used as the basis for this study incorporates research related to mentoring and efficacy as well as the theory of social exchange. Literature on communities of practice as a model of professional learning is also included, as this was is the proposed model of intervention for this case study. In order to establish an understanding of the context of the study, the review begins with literature that explains the development of professional development schools and highlights the aim of such partnerships. The incorporation of writing about professional development schools is critical, as the setting of this study addresses a gap in current literature about mentor professional development.

The review of literature examines past and current research related to the development of pre-service teachers through education preparation programs and field placement experiences. Because this action research is conducted in a professional development school, research on such programs is included to establish an understanding of this model of school reform. Additionally, the review explores the roles and qualities of supervising teachers and mentors and their preparation to serve in such capacities. In order to better understand the need for mentor preparation, this review analyzes teacher efficacy and its effect on professional practice. Attention will also be given to communities of practice as a means of understanding how veteran teachers learn to mentor from within the professional setting.

The theories that serve as lenses to examine the proposed research questions are Bandura's self efficacy and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's teacher efficacy, Homan's social exchange theory and Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning and communities of practice.

Professional Development Schools

During his tenure in office, President Ronald Reagan established the National Commission on Excellence in Education to address the perceived failure of the country's educational system in preparing youth for the workforce (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003; Nolan, 2000). The most significant outcome of this commission came when members presented a report of findings entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983). The publication of this document signified a public acknowledgement of the lack of effectiveness of educational institutions. Consequently, educational reform became the new buzzword in political settings, and sweeping restructuring became the climate in schools and in teacher preparation programs (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Sandholtz & Dadlez, 2000).

The *A Nation at Risk* report consisted of five areas of recommendations—content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support. Recommendation D—teaching—is the most relevant to the preparation of educators. The seven parts of Recommendation D address standards of expectations for those being prepared to teach, salaries and contract improvements, opportunities for career growth that acknowledge the progression of skill sets, and the inclusion of master teachers in the development of teacher education programs and supervision of novices to the field (United States, 1983). The last provision of Recommendation D, master teachers

working with teacher education, has the greatest significance for this action research study.

The establishment of Professional Development Schools (PDS) partnerships was a response to the public outcry for immediate changes to the country's educational system (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Gimbert & Nolan, 2003; Nolan, 2000). The Holmes Group and the National Network for Educational Renewal were two entities that worked collaboratively to develop innovative practices to improve teacher education and P-12 instruction (Nolan, 2000). These two groups have received credit for being the primary "authors" of the professional development schools initiative. Although there had been a long history of P-12 schools and colleges and universities working together, the concept of creating official professional development school partnerships did not arise until after the *A Nation at Risk* report (Nolan, 2000).

Although the name Professional Development School is somewhat of a proprietary term that encompasses specific criteria, it has become more of a generic phrase used to describe any relationship that exists between colleges and public schools (Melser, 2004). The loose use of the title PDS has been perceived by some as diminishing the meaning of such a title and has caused claims of their effectiveness in reforming the educational agenda to lose credence (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). As a result, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (2008) established nine "essentials" that must be present for P-12 and university partnerships to consider themselves official PDS schools. Their goal was to provide structure and quality control mechanisms for the PDS movement (NAPDS, 2008).

The National Association for Professional Development Schools recognizes that the role of classroom teachers in the professional development of pre-service teachers is invaluable. Teacher practitioners provide the practice experience needed to apply theory learned to real world situations (Allen et al., 2013; Nolan, 2000). Schussler (2006) reiterated the importance of professional development schools in educational reform by saying that the model "allows them [professional development schools] to collaborate in education of prospective teachers" (p. 72). It is imperative that higher education institutions work with public schools to provide mentor teachers with the support needed to embrace their role as collaborators in the teacher education process. Although some level of collaborative relationship in teacher preparation programs is the norm between most higher education institutions (HEI) and public schools, formalized partnerships are not commonplace (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003).

In response to greater educational accountability, some stakeholders contend that educational reform must be coupled with improved teacher quality (NCATE, 2001). It is their belief that the face of public education cannot be changed without strengthening education preparation programs. The National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) provides guidance on the purpose of professional development schools and outlines nine standards of expectation for successful implementation. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education defines professional development schools as "innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P-12 schools. Their mission is professional preparation of candidates, faculty development, inquiry directed at the improvement of practice, and enhanced student learning" (2001, p. 1). The partnership that exists

between Faith Central University and Central School District strives to "transform education at all levels through a systemic, shared and comprehensive partnership" (University of Georgia, 2015, p. 1). As partners, the two institutions have established roles and expectations that support teacher preparation, student learning, professional learning, and policy and program development. In addition, the two groups have also worked together to influence state and federal educational policy in a manner that improves the day-to-day operations of local schools. At the individual school level, one of the most frequently articulated benefits of the professional development school relationship is the opportunity to provide pre-service teachers with more real world opportunities for practice (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003; Nolan, 2000). National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001) reiterates this identified need by stating, "Educators in both schools and universities point to the gap between research and practice, and to the poor articulation between professional preparation and the real world of school reform" (p. 2).

Pennsylvania State University is a leader in professional development schools and was one of the campuses visited by Central School District and Faith Central University during their exploration of PDS possibilities. Penn State's K-8 program is designed around the "4 Es" of success: "enhance the educational experiences of all children, ensure high quality inductions of new teachers into our professions, engage in furthering our own professional growth as teachers and teacher educators of all children, and educate the next generation of teacher educators" (Pennsylvania State University, 2015, p. 1).

As a professional development school, Fredrick Brown Elementary is in a unique position to influence the preparation of significant numbers of teacher candidates yearly. Gimbert and Nolan (2003) acknowledge the difference in roles of teachers and university faculty in professional development settings, noting that "the cooperating teacher has greater influence on the student teacher in the traditional context of student teaching than does the university supervisor" (p. 376). However, they continue by suggesting that professional development associates have a more significant role than that of traditional supervisors. Although the implementation of the professional development schools model has multiple benefits, Gimbert and Nolan (2003) urge those who engage in such partnerships to be aware of the inherent challenges: "Institutions contemplating the development of PDS partnerships must confront the question of how to support university faculty members, graduate students, and classroom teachers as they develop contextually appropriate supervisor understandings and skills" (p. 377). Although most education professionals engaged in some form of practicum placement or student teaching prior to completing their degree program, most did so in a traditional setting. Consequently, the professional development school student teaching model is new to them. The findings of Gimbert and Nolan (2003) are reflective of the experiences of faculty at Fredrick Brown Elementary as they have negotiated the implementation of the PDS model.

Mentoring

The role of classroom teachers in the professional development of pre-service teachers is invaluable. O'Brian et al. (2007) state that "the cooperating teacher is one of the most influential factors in the pre-service teacher's preparation program" (p. 264). Teacher practitioners provide the practice experience needed to apply theory learned in

classrooms to real world situations (Nolan, 2000). Fairbanks, Freedman, and Kahn (2000) define mentoring as a "teaching/learning situation in which student teachers are cognitively and affectively changed as a consequence of their mentoring experiences" (p. 103). A more comprehensive definition of mentoring is provided by Petersen and Treagust (2014):

> Mentoring is a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees who work towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee. The relationship usually follows a developmental pattern within a specified timeframe and roles are defined, expectations are outlined and a purpose is (ideally) clearly delineated. (p. 52)

Multiple titles have been used in the literature to describe the role of those who work with student teachers (Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner, 2013; Petersen & Treagust, 2014; Uusimaki, 2013). Some of the language used includes supervising teachers, cooperating teachers, and mentor teachers. Just as there are varying titles for the individuals that serve in the mentor role, there is also a wide range of terms used to describe the placement experience. Common terms are field placement, practicum experience, student teaching, and internship (Bates & Burbank, 2008). O'Brian et al. (2007) suggest that the varying titles are reflective of inconsistent expectations for the placement of student teachers. Higher education institutions have different expectations for the field experiences that are required to complete teacher education programs. Thus, it is difficult to develop consistent requirements for those who serve as mentors.

As the nation has continued its focus on educational reform as a means of improving student achievement and equalizing opportunities for all demographic groups,

mentoring has surfaced as a critical component in the process (Bates & Burbank, 2008). Mentoring has been credited with contributing to the reform movement by improving the quality of teachers who are entering the field (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Patton et al., 2005). Patton et al. (2005) contend that "mentoring as a reform tool is a means of gratifying and sustaining skillful teachers while building a renewed, re-energized professional culture with a concentration on improving teaching and learning through assessment" (p. 303).

Educational reform has had positive impacts on the field of teacher preparation through the increased focus on mentoring (Bates & Burbank, 2008). However, O'Brian et al. (2007) argue that not all outcomes of reform have benefitted the field of education preparation. These authors suggest that fears related to No Child Left Behind have caused reluctance by many classroom teachers to release control of classroom instruction and student learning. Consequently, teachers are less motivated to host pre-service candidates in their classrooms.

The role of mentors in the education setting has been studied extensively by many researchers. Feiman-Nemser's (2001) concept of educative mentoring is similar conceptually to others who refer to mentors as facilitators of learning and shared inquiry and focuses on the role of teacher as teacher educator. In this capacity, teachers work with pre-service or novice teachers on areas of immediate need, such as lesson planning and behavior management, while also developing more extensive, long-term plans for professional learning. Educative mentoring includes "cultivating a disposition of inquiry, focusing attention on student thinking and understanding, and fostering disciplined talk about problems of practice" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 28). Glenn (2006) expands on

this thought, noting that "student teaching should provide students the opportunity to grow as educators – to learn from those who are more knowledgeable, to take risks, and to fail without becoming failures" (p. 85). Moulding, Stewart, and Dunmeyer (2014) state that "new teachers often perceive that field experiences are the most influential part of their preparation" (p. 60).

Mentoring within the context of a professional development school setting can have added benefits, as there is generally greater involvement from university faculty and more intensive support from school faculty and other pre-service candidates (Nolan, 2000). The benefits of mentoring within the PDS model are captured simply in the title of an article written by Gimbert (2001). In "The Power of Multiple Mentoring in the Context of a Professional Development School: E Pluribus Unum—Out of Many, One*"*, the author acknowledges the multiple mentors that exist within the context of a professional development school. Pre-service candidates have access to many formal and informal mentors, such as mentor teachers, professional development associates, students, peer interns, parents, administrators, and other teachers within the building (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Leshem, 2014; Yaman, 2013). This abundance of supportive individuals provides continuous learning experiences that extend beyond the walls of the traditional classroom and placement setting.

Jim Nolan, nationally known professional development school scholar, wrote an article examining how his role as a university supervisor differed in a professional development school setting. He reported that the higher level of involvement allowed time for greater relationship development, which translated into time to become a co-teacher and colleague (Nolan, 2000). His reflections also highlighted an increased

knowledge of individual interns and their needs and better understanding of the students that his interns served. Nolan expanded on this research with an additional study with Gimbert on how the professional development school context changes the experiences of university supervisors and interns (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). Their findings were similar to Nolan's original research and stressed the value of year-long placements in the development of relationships (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). According to the authors, stronger relationships between interns and supervisors allow for more opportunities for readiness building and opportunities to utilize multiple stages of supervision.

Harford and MacRuairc (2008) stress the importance of school leaders and university faculty seeking to understand how to ensure meaningful learning experiences for pre-service teachers in the K-12 setting. Their study focused on the value of reflection within a community of practice. Their findings stress that it is imperative that mentors support pre-service teachers in becoming reflective practitioners. However, the sustainability of such practices was not evident as pre-service teachers transitioned to beginning teachers. Harford and MacRuairc note that "the absence of a national system of induction, whereby newly qualified teachers receive structured induction support, with designated time and support given over to reflective practice, is a critical stumbling block" (p. 1890).

In an effort to support the growth of pre-service teachers, university and school-level professionals must collaboratively engage in meaningful discourse regarding models of best mentoring practices (Arhar et al., 2013; Yendol-Hoppey, Dana, & Delane, 2009). The traditional view of student teacher supervision as a linear process where supervisors simply direct the actions of pre-service teachers is a model that is challenged

by some in academia (e.g., Glenn, 2006; Patton et al., 2005). Danielson (2002) references the hierarchical view of mentoring where the mentor is in a position of superiority and seen as the sole owner of knowledge and skills. In the traditional model, pre-service teachers are subject to the beliefs of their professors, university supervisor, placement supervisors, school leaders, and many others that they encounter in their path to teacher development (Glenn, 2006; Patton et al., 2005). Glenn (2006) suggests that mentors should be collaborative rather than dictatorial, release control when it is appropriate to do so and at reasonable intervals, develop personal connections, provide and accept constructive feedback, and be accepting of differences.

The existence of set expectations by mentors for the supervision process potentially leads to the development of new teachers who are simply replicas of their mentors rather than new professionals who represent who they are as determined by the various experiences they have had and the new identities they create as a result of those experiences (Glenn, 2006; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Patton et al. (2005) concur with the shift of mentoring from a dictator role to one of guidance and suggest that mentors should be "facilitating the professional growth of new teachers by providing them opportunities to observe, engage in practice teaching, and receive feedback and new ideas about curriculum and instruction" (p. 304). Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) reinforce the findings of others by encouraging supervising teachers to shift from simply being conduits of information to serving as facilitators of cognitive dialogue. Their research highlights the value of mentors guiding "the novice through questions and probes in order to allow the student teacher the opportunity to reflect upon their own practice" (p. 126).

Pennsylvania State University (2015) provides a mentor resource link on their website that contains clear guidance on how the mentor/mentee relationship should progress during the year that the two individuals work together. Their calendar acknowledges the progressive nature of the relationship and the gradual release of responsibility from mentor to mentee. In addition, the website stresses the importance of dialogue in the development of pre-service teachers and their acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

The proposal of supervisors and pre-service teachers engaging in mutual discourse and reflection is indicative of the shift from classroom teachers serving as mentors instead of supervisors. Research findings suggest that mentoring includes a relationship development component that does not exist in traditional supervision settings (Bradbury, 2010; Ediger, 2009). The relationship between mentor and mentee becomes the foundation for the growth of professional skills as each party works collaboratively to explore new skills and to identify personal beliefs that can affect teaching. Ambrosetti (2014) supports this position by suggesting that in mentoring, "the relationship becomes central to the interactions that occur" (p. 31).

Ambrosetti (2012) identified three components of mentoring—relational, developmental, and contextual—that represent categories that are similar to, yet broader than, those developed by Sayeski and Paulsen (2012). It is her contention that a complete or holistic mentoring model consists of all three components. While the relational component addresses the relationship between mentor and mentee, the development arm of the triad focuses on the professional needs of both members of the team. Recent mentoring research has iterated the didactic relationship that exists between supervising

teacher and pre-service teachers (Petersen & Treagust, 2014). Study findings support the notion of these relationships being non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial. The contextual component relates more to the overall managerial tasks that teachers perform daily and how they conduct their work within the school setting. Ambrosetti contends that all three components are necessary for a comprehensive mentoring experience.

Kagan (1992) reviewed almost thirty research studies on the development of pre-service teachers. Her findings reiterated how students' pre-existing beliefs can affect their development as educators. In addition, her research suggests that most pre-service teachers are not flexible in their beliefs and that these preconceived thoughts can directly impact how students allow themselves to learn from their practicum experiences. These findings confirm the need for open and reflective dialogue during the mentoring process. Simoncini, Lasen, and Rocco (2014) suggest that professional dialogue is an essential component of reflective practice and that the two practices work together to transform learning. Their research found that some pre-service teachers benefitted from being exposed to beliefs that conflicted with those that they personally held. The confrontation with thought processes that were incongruent with their own provided opportunities for rich discussion and professional growth. A critical finding by the authors is a method to aid pre-service teachers in "learning how to learn—from others, as well as, in and from practice" (Simoncini et al. 2014, p. 40).

The concept of challenging pre-service teachers' existing perspectives with new frames of thought is also suggested by Bates and Burbank (2008). These researchers contend that university supervisors should take a more active role in the mentoring of student teachers and should initiate the discourse needed to extend the learning of pre-

service teachers. They suggest that these reflective conversations occur during feedback sessions between the mentee and university supervisor. Others also have acknowledged how various perspectives can contribute to the professional development of pre-service teachers. In addition, these perspectives can challenge teacher educators to examine how student teachers give meaning to the different views that they encounter from other professionals on a daily basis (Hawkey, 1997; Ediger, 2009; Ambrosetti, 2012).

Atiles and Pinholster (2013) and Yendol-Hoppey et al. (2009) also analyzed the power of inquiry in improving educational practice and mentoring. Yendol-Hoppey et al.'s findings suggest inquiry as a foundational requirement for addressing many of the unavoidable pitfalls of mentoring. According to them, "the tensions, and dilemmas associated with the complexity of mentoring can be unearthed, explored, and resolved through the inquiry process" (p. 12). Arhar et al. (2013) also stress the value and importance of university-school partnerships as avenues for inquiry communities. In their examination of critical conversations among educational stakeholders, they highlight the necessity of protected time and space for these inquiry-based dialogues. They used the phrase "third spaces" to describe these communities of inquiry and stress their value in gaining new knowledge about educational practice.

Hudson, Usak, and Savran-Gencer (2014) value the role of mentors in the preparation of new teachers, noting that "pre-service teachers in their roles as mentees require experienced guidance when in the school setting" (p. 63). The authors deem the following attributes to be important in effective mentors: good listener, flexibility, emphasis on important issues, communication and reflection skills, and the ability to expose mentees to new experiences. Their study also highlighted concerns expressed by

mentees that related to a lack of planning for the mentoring process, a misunderstanding of the mentoring process, and a focus on issues of curriculum rather than on a holistic approach to their development as teachers.

Considering the critical role that mentoring serves in the preparation of new teachers, it is imperative that effective placements are made. Many researchers have found that the student teaching placement and the role of supervising or mentor teachers has the greatest influence on the academic development of teacher candidates (Kagan, 1992; Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley & Smith, 2012, Ambrosetti, 2014). Elliott and Calderhead (1994) contend that student teachers' professional growth is most influenced by mentors. If mentor experience has such a critical role in the development of new teachers, ensuring that placements are effective and responsive to the needs of both mentors and mentees is essential.

In order to effectively provide the mentoring support that pre-service teachers need, schools must identify and assign quality educators to this role. Glenn (2006) states that "the selection of qualified cooperating teachers with whom these students will work is accordingly imperative" (p. 85). Glenn's study of pre-service teacher needs from mentors highlighted the importance of modeling effective practices, planning and organization, observing positive relationship building with students, content knowledge, routines and procedures, and classroom management. There is varying research on what traits and skills are necessary to qualify as an effective mentor.

Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) identified six areas of mentoring practices: (a) pre-planning; (b) sharing resources; (c) constructive, specific feedback; (d) multi-modal feedback, including written feedback; (e) modeling of effective practices; and (f)

practices demonstrating trust and confidence. These six categories summarize the traits and skills identified by other researchers as being most important in the mentor process. Although the list may seem brief, the micro-level tasks that are embedded in each can be expansive and exhausting for one individual to provide to another.

Hudson and Hudson (2010) and Hudson et al. (2009) present a five-factor mentoring model that encapsulates into one perspective the areas that other researchers have identified as critical to a successful placement experience for pre-service teachers. The authors suggest that quality mentoring involves personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modeling, and feedback. Their studies illuminated the importance of all five areas of the mentoring framework. In spite of the identification of the five components of mentoring found to be essential in the authors' work, Hudson et al.'s (2009) study of mentees' perceptions of mentor experiences showed that almost one-third of the practices deemed as important were not provided consistently by their mentors.

The development of a strong cadre of mentor teachers has extensive benefits for both the mentors and the pre-service students with whom they work (Caldarella, Gomm, Shatzer, & Wall, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Janssen, van Vuuren, & de Jong, 2014). While the benefits to the pre-service teacher are more obvious, professionals frequently overlook the advantages for themselves when serving in this capacity. Serving as a mentor teacher can provide opportunities for professional growth through exposure to new theories and practice methodologies as well as the opportunity to engage in collective inquiry and discourse with new and energetic mentees who are about to enter the teaching profession (Ambrosetti, 2012; Hudson & Hudson, 2010). Scheetz, Waters,

Smeaton, and Lare (2005) had similar findings regarding benefits to mentoring in professional development schools. The authors reported greater professional growth due to increased opportunities to engage in dialogue about pedagogy, best practices, and student learning. In addition, teachers reported that having pre-service teachers in their classrooms resulted in them feeling compelled to always model best practices. This modeling translated into more effective teaching practices on a consistent basis.

Researchers have examined the correlation between perceived mentor benefits and motivations to engage in mentoring activities. Sinclair, Dowson, and Thistleton-Martin (2006) conducted research with mentors to determine factors that impacted their motivation to serve in their roles. The authors summarized the motivators identified in their findings as boosters, guzzlers, and enticers. Boosters, those factors that served as positive motivators for mentoring, were benefits and contingencies such as opportunities for professional development, sharing of professional knowledge, having only one student teacher at a time, and being provided sound guidelines from the university regarding procedures and expectations. In contrast, guzzlers, or factors that negatively influenced mentor motivation, were the additional work responsibility that accompanied the role, insufficient and conflicting guidelines by university faculty, lack of confidence in their own abilities, an unmet desire to have respite from supervising, and being a beginning teacher or being new to a particular school. Finally, enticers, possible future motivators, were payments or stipends for mentoring and the availability of additional supervisor or mentor training. The synopsis of boosters and guzzlers closely mirrored the discussions of motivators in the literature and of informal focus group discussions at Fredrick Brown Elementary School. Of significant relevance to this study was the

identification of the need for supervision and mentor training and the need for periodic respite from the role of mentoring.

A review of the literature from more than twenty years ago highlights how thoughts regarding mentoring benefits were similar then to the conversations among educators today. Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser (1996) studied five mentors who had worked with novice teachers. Their findings were that those who served as mentors reported greater clarity about their own teaching and benefits of being more open to reflecting on their own practices. Consequently, the mentors felt greater feelings of professionalism. Melser (2004) and Rodgers and Keil (2007) had similar findings related to the opportunities given to mentor teachers to engage in shared supervision of pre-service candidates. Shifts from simply serving as a host to a student teacher to having the opportunity to actively participate in instructional supervision gave mentor teachers increased responsibilities for the development of the teacher candidate. In addition, the greater presence of university liaisons within the school provided more resources for teacher professional learning (Allen, Ambrosetti & Turner, 2013; Ediger, 2009; Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). Mentor benefits were confirmed in research by Hudson and Hudson (2010), who focused on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship from the perspective of the mentor. Respondents reported desiring to mentor pre-service teachers because it allows them to grow professionally and gives them an opportunity to contribute to pre-service education, thus improving the caliber of new educators entering the field.

The change from a patriarchal view of directive supervision to one that is more collegial benefits mentor and mentee, but requires training on how to effectively engage

in such practices (Patton et al., 2005; Petersen & Treagust, 2014). Hobson et al. (2012) referenced the recommendations of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education when stating that mentor teachers "should be selected for their deep expertise, extensive experience, and planned match with candidates from similar subject area and grade level" (p. 70). While this is a logical recommendation, it is not an option for schools that are engaged in a professional development agreement requiring different practices.

One would naturally assume a prerequisite of strong content knowledge for any professional who accepts the role of mentoring or supervising a novice in his or her field. The Penn State PDS (2015) website highlights the unique role of teacher mentors in stating that "mentor teachers who work with PDS interns agree to take on the new role of teacher educator in addition to their traditional role of classroom teaching" (p. 2). Being a teacher educator is a new expectation for many classroom teachers because it teaching subject content to K-12 students is quite different from teaching pedagogical and related skills to college students (Hudson et al. 2009; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Ambrosetti, 2012).

Ambrosetti (2012) addresses the lack of preparation for mentor teachers by suggesting that "mentoring has not been a priority in many pre-service teacher education programs" (p. 3). Hudson and Hudson (2010) concur with this finding, stating that "mentors require professional development to help mentees reflect effectively on their teaching" (p. 158). They continue by suggesting that "there is inadequate education to prepare mentors on how to develop effective primary teachers" (p. 158). Effective mentoring is a purposeful and carefully thought-out process. It requires more than simply

modeling instructional strategies and routine activities like making copies and completing report cards. Instead, mentors must learn to objectively analyze their own practices and perspectives and then help the mentees to engage in the same exercise of self-reflection (Cooper, 2013; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Yaman, 2013). Walkington (2005) suggests that "reflection on one's own perceptions, beliefs, experiences and practices is a core activity for all teachers—pre-service and in-service, in schools and universities" (p. 59).

Other researchers have addressed the need for preparation programs for mentor teachers (Ambrosetti, 2014; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Hudson, 2007; Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Yaman, 2013). Although practicum placements are a requirement of most teacher preparation programs, little attention is given to ensuring that the mentor or supervising teachers have the skills needed to effectively serve in this capacity.

Rice (2007) examined the preparation of mentors within the contexts of public schools and higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Very similar to the dilemmas faced in the United States, she found that there were no explicit qualifications for an experienced teacher and there was not a method to quantify skill level needed to serve as a mentor. Nesheim, Moran, and Pendleton (2014) support the need for careful placement and for mentor preparation programs to develop the skills needed. In addition, these authors stress the role that administrators play in supporting the mentoring process to ensure its effectiveness.

Hudson and Hudson (2010) have engaged in multiple studies regarding the absence of mentor preparation for the important roles that they hold in teacher education. Their research supports the contention of many researchers that mentors are not

sufficiently trained for mentoring. The authors contend that "mentors are not provided with adequate education to mentor effectively" (p. 158). Ambrosetti (2014) expands on Hudson and Hudson's position, noting that "mentoring is not a natural ability that people inherently have, so an effective teacher may not necessarily make an effective mentor" (p. 30). Orland-Barak (2001) concurs, stating that "the passage from being a teacher of children to becoming a mentor of teachers does not occur naturally" (p. 53). The lack of availability of born mentors necessitates the need for developing comprehensive mentoring training programs. Most proponents of mentoring believe that the required skills can be taught to those who desire to support the development of teacher candidates (Ambrosetti, 2014; Evertson & Smithney, 2000; Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Hennisen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Kothagen, & Bergen, 2011; Hudson, 2013).

Ambrosetti (2014) offers recommendations for a mentor preparation course and provides research findings on its effectiveness. Her research focuses on the implementation of four weekly afterschool sessions designed to improve mentors' understanding of their roles and skills needed to be successful as mentors. Ambrosetti's recommended program includes teaching programmatic skills as well as instruction on how to mentor. The qualitative study found changed understandings and practices of mentoring for most participants.

Engstrom and Danielson (2006) developed an on-site professional learning program for mentor teachers. They posited that an effective preparation program should be a "collaborative learning process that is authentic and embedded in the teachers' work day" (p. 170). In addition, the authors contend that university partnerships should provide resources for school-based professional learning that aids in the building of collegiality

among professionals. Freiburg et al. (1996) support this notion of job-embedded mentor training with suggestions of "integrating mentoring into professional development activities and the structures of schools" (p. 2). A 2004 study by Melser referenced a university-sponsored supervision of student teachers course that was provided on-site at an elementary school. One would assume that recommendations from almost two decades ago would be common practice today. However, current studies suggest that while this model is common in some areas of education, such as job-embedded professional learning, it is not the norm for mentor preparation.

The need for such a professional learning module for mentors is found repeatedly in literature as others have examined the effectiveness of mentor relationships in teacher education programs (Hennisen et al., 2011; Holloway, 2001; Hudson, 2007; Hudson, 2013; Melser, 2004). Hudson (2013) goes beyond acknowledging the need for mentor preparation courses by urging higher education institutions to assume responsibility for developing and providing the training to mentors. Yendol-Hoppey et al. (2009) also call for greater involvement of university faculty in helping mentor teachers improve their mentoring skills. They suggest that university faculty should engage in professional dialogue with mentors to encourage inquiry into their practice, noting that "one way to support the ongoing development of mentors is to regularly meet with them to engage in a systematic study of their practice as a part of their mentoring work within the PDS" (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009). The authors suggest that more research is needed on methods to improve professional development for mentors on their role as "teacher educators" (p. 12). Holloway (2001) reiterated the role of mentors as teacher educators, noting that "appropriate training for the mentor's expanded teaching role improves the

quality of a mentoring program" (p. 85). While there is substantial support for the value of providing training for mentors, it is imperative that consideration be given to how to best meet their learning needs. For adult learners, learning is most beneficial when it is job-embedded so that the context mirrors real life (Bradbury, 2010). In order to effectively support adults in their learning as mentors, consideration should be given to the differences in teaching children content skills and teaching adults pedagogical and professional skills. Klinge (2015) examined the collaborative and reciprocal nature of adult mentoring relationships. Her writings focus on the benefits to both mentor and mentee as adults who are reflectively creating learning experiences for themselves.

The review of the literature calls attention to the relationship between classroom mentors and university supervisors. Many authors urge greater involvement by university faculty in supporting K-12 teachers (Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner, 2013: Edger, 2009; Gimbert & Nolan, 2003; Melser, 2004). Such recommendations support contentions by other researchers that the benefits of PDS partnerships are frequently greatest for higher education institutions. Lynch and Smith (2012) and Bloomfield (2009) have studied the lack of mutual benefits in school and higher education institution partnerships. These researchers suggest that universities could and should provide greater support to public school teachers in the area of professional learning and note that mentoring could be one of the topics addressed. These findings support the concerns expressed by informal focus groups of teachers in Means County's professional development schools. Many teachers are willing and eager to actively participate in the partnership with Faith Central University, but would appreciate more tangible forms of benefits for themselves and their schools. The provision of focused professional learning

on mentoring would also be a positive step in the direction of collaboration that would benefit both classroom and pre-service teachers.

Self Efficacy Theory

Bandura (1993) suggests that individual functioning is determined by "mechanisms of personal agency" (p. 118). Of these mechanisms, he notes that "none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (p. 118). Bandura (1977) found through his studies that an individual's self efficacy correlates directly with his or her related behaviors. An extension of Bandura's seminal work on individual efficacy was Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's concept of teacher efficacy, both of which are grounded in social cognitive theory. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) posit that "efficacy affects the effort they [teachers] invest in teaching, the goals they set and their levels of aspiration" (p. 783) This concept can be transferred to mentor effectiveness, as one presumes that a teacher's personal efficacy shapes how he or she performs or behaves in the mentor role.

It is common to hear the terms self-esteem and self-efficacy used interchangeably. However, there is a distinct difference between the two concepts. According to Hardy, Spendlove, and Shortt (2015), self esteem relates more to a person's value of his or her own worth. In contrast, they note that "self efficacy decisions are personal judgments of the likelihood of success in specific circumstances rather than a judgment of general competence in the area" (p. 151.) Another definition of efficacy with a focus on educators suggests that self efficacy is a "teacher's belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific

teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). A copious amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. One may assume that the same reasoning can be applied to the connection between teacher efficacy and confidence in mentoring pre-service teachers. If efficacy directly ties to the effectiveness of teachers, it would be logical to assume that greater efforts would be made to ensure that teachers have the skill set needed to be efficacious. Moulding, Stewart, and Dunmeyer (2014) support this line of thinking, suggesting that "teacher efficacy has been shown to play a role in teacher effectiveness and, therefore, should be promoted by teacher preparation programs" (p. 61).

Albert Bandura, who is credited with some of the most referenced work on efficacy, identified four factors that affect an individual's willingness to approach new or challenging academic tasks. His four hypotheses of self efficacy building are the individual's previous experience with the task, observation of others (modeling), encouragement from others (e.g., a colleague or superior), and a person's own physiological responses to experiences (Bandura, 1977). Of his four hypotheses, previous experience with the task, observation, and verbal encouragement can all have relevance on teacher willingness to mentor.

Teachers who have experienced success with student achievement and other areas of teacher leadership develop the confidence needed to attempt similar and more complex tasks in the future (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). According to Bandura, a positive previous experience serves as the impetus for the efficacy needed to expand one's professional activities. Hardy et al. (2015) contend that although the nature of self

efficacy is focused on the ability to succeed at a task in the future, its basis is derived from one's experiences and success with an activity in the past. This perspective closely aligns with Bandura's concept of mastery experiences.

Bandura's concept of verbal persuasion can come through feedback, compliments, and professional dialogue as teachers engage in formal and informal conversations about their roles as mentors and related ideas and concerns that they may have (Hardy et al., 2015). According to Hardy et al.,"persuasive communication has the potential to raise self-efficacy and is strongest when feedback is delivered by someone with status and whose judgment is viewed to be reliable and competent" (p. 151). Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) suggest that teachers who are efficacious also exhibit a willingness to try complex strategies, are open to new ideas, and exhibit a greater level of enthusiasm for their work. All of the traits of efficacy directly align with traits that other researchers have identified as being present in effective mentors (Faucette & Nugent, 2012; Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012).

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) identified three dimensions of teachers' sense of self efficacy with a rating scale: efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management. Teacher feelings of confidence and success in each of these three areas are critical for the transfer of related knowledge to pre-service teachers. The three components rated in the scale generally categorize the primary areas that mentor teachers help to supervise in the practicum setting. While strengths in these areas do not transfer into an inherent ability to teach the same skills to others, the related foundational knowledge is a prerequisite for mentor work.

An interesting contrast to the benefits of efficacy was found in research by Hardy et al. (2015). Their findings highlight the source of some of the possible tensions that can exist between mentor and pre-service teachers. In their study on pre-service teacher efficacy, they found that some pre-service teachers "think that they will be extremely competent when they become teachers and that they will significantly outperform the teachers they will be joining" (p. 164). This elevated sense of self can frequently be felt in the practicum setting and can lead to difficulties when mentors attempt to provide support to those who already feel superior to them. It is imperative that mentor teachers have the feelings of competence and efficacy needed to exert themselves as the veteran teacher when such conflicts arise.

A gap in the literature exists regarding teacher efficacy for mentoring. There is considerable research on generalized teacher efficacy and on how efficacy is built among pre-service teachers. However, there are limited studies on how teacher efficacy plays into their confidence in and ability to mentor. Moulding et al. (2014) determined that there is a positive correlation between teachers'overall sense of efficacy and their efficacy for mentoring. However, more extensive research is needed to strengthen understanding in this area.

Communities of Practice

While it may be presumptuous to explore theory related to how mentors learn to perform in their roles, preliminary conversations with Fredrick Brown teachers, coupled with extensive readings from the literature base, suggest that there is a critical need for mentor preparation programs. Although the action research team was charged with an

extensive exploration of mentor perception within the school, some form of professional learning will be inevitable during the course of an action research intervention.

In 1991, researchers Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger published their seminal work, *Situated Learning*. The focus of their research was to examine how learning extends beyond formalized institutions of learning into professional work settings. In an attempt to examine how professionals continued in their acquisition of knowledge, Lave and Wenger studied the centers of learning that naturally occurred as workers observed, shared, and learned from each other. They coined the phrases *situated learning* and *communities of practice* to describe learning within the framework of practice and participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Bryan and Carpenter (2008) further describe the concept of community as "an anthropological perspective in terms of shared rituals that provide identity, language that bonds the group together and shared values that are realised through specific practices" (p. 49).

Situated learning and communities of practice have been used extensively to examine the field of nursing and how those new to the field learn beyond the classroom setting. Cope, Cuthbertson, and Stoddart (2000) conducted research on the role of practice placement in the professional development of nursing students. The authors suggest that "experts do not operate by following rules derived from higher-order knowledge but rather, by using complex situational understanding" (p. 851). They continue by positing that "the key to the development of skills of this nature is practice in authentic contexts" (p. 851). The importance of technical training is not negated within the situated learning framework. Instead, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that this learning must be supplemented by knowledge gained from other professionals within the

context of practice. Current literature refers to such learning as job embedded and reinforces the importance of professionals learning within the work setting, where new skills can be applied in a practical manner (Bryan & Carpenter, 2008).

The concept of communities of practice as a platform for teachers to gain new skills by learning from others who work within their professional context relates to Bandura's (1977) principles of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion. As teachers observe colleagues in action with pre-service teachers, they are able to gain new ideas for their own practice. In addition, the modeling of instructional supervision-related practices by veteran teachers and administrators can serve as efficacy-building tools for novices who seek to expand their repertoire of skills.

While the focus of this study is on how mentors learn the components of their role within the practice setting, research also exists on the theory of communities of practice with regard to how pre-service teachers learn from mentors. Patton el al. (2005) examine the role of the school context in preparing teacher education students as they observe professionals and learn how to apply their technical knowledge in a practical setting. Hudson et al. (2009) support the role of modeling in communities of practice, noting that "pre-service teachers learn through observation of their mentor's modeling of teaching practices" (p. 64). The process of social participation serves as an impetus for student learning and acquisition of professional skills. Cheng (2014) also examined the role of communities of practice in the placement setting for kindergarten student teachers. The author's findings support the value of the community of practice framework in helping mentees solve problems due to a greater sense of independence. Hudson et al.'s (2009) research supports the role of modeling, observation, and feedback, suggesting that "the

mentee can develop self-confidence by observing the mentor's practices and incorporating the mentor's feedback" (p. 64). The concept of developing confidence among mentor and mentee can be extended to new mentors learning from those who are veterans.

Cheng (2014) makes an important distinction between cognitive apprenticeships and communities of practice. According to her synthesis of Lave and Wenger's work, cognitive apprenticeships are focused on the needs of the mentee and end when the learner is competent. In comparison, communities of practice focus on developing skills of all members as long as there is an interest. Cheng states that a community of practice "is a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise. A community has a core of participants whose passion for the topic energizes the community and who provide intellectual and social leadership" (p. 17). This distinction reiterates the value of communities of practice in mentor teacher preparation as teachers learn new skills from each other.

The preparation and training of mentor teachers can occur within formal course settings at universities or regional educational service agencies available in some states. However, significant learning can also occur in a more job-embedded manner within the school setting itself. In this latter scenario, teachers can participate in structured professional learning modules and can also learn from others within their community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that those who participate in communities of practice are bound by a common interest, a desire to learn from each other, and a willingness to share their experiences with others within the community. Patton et al.

(2005) expand on this concept, noting that situated learning suggests that "knowledge is inseparable from the contexts and activities in which it develops" (p. 305).

Mentoring literature stresses the importance of participation in formal training modules in order to better prepare mentor for their roles. However, one cannot minimize the wealth of knowledge that exists in the work setting among colleagues. Harford and MacRuairc (2008) note, "the rationale underpinning the concept of a community of practice has particular relevance for educational settings because it recognises the variety of perspectives and activities that prevail in such settings" (p. 1885). In 1998, Wenger expanded on his theory of situated learning to include three additional layers of how communities work together: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. He considered these three components to be essential to the communities of practice model. The layers consist of a relationship between those in the community, a shared understanding of the work that connects them to each other, and a common set of resources generated from their collective expertise. Bandura (1993) holds similar beliefs as Wenger in regard to the collaborative nature of the practice of education, stating that "teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system rather than as isolates" (p. 141). He expands on his belief by noting that "school staff members who collectively judge themselves capable of promoting academic success imbue their schools with a positive atmosphere for development" (p. 141). It is this sense of individual and collective self efficacy that can lead to strong communities of practice that possess the skills to influence educational reform, teacher preparation, and student achievement.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory gives consideration to the importance of costs and benefits when individuals decide whether to engage in a particular activity. Homan (1958) states that "an incidental advantage of an exchange theory is that it might bring sociology closer to economics" (p. 598). This simple, yet profound, statement summarizes the conversations of many teachers within the context of this study as they seek to weigh the benefits of their role as mentor. There is a plethora of articles that address the multitude of benefits for pre-service teachers within the practicum setting (Allen et al., 2013; Caldarella et al., 2010; Freiberg et al., 1996; Hudson & Hudson, 2010). As researchers have discussed the perceived benefits and costs of mentoring**,** social exchange theory serves as an appropriate lens for examining these relationships. Lejonberg and Christophersen (2015) suggest that "the idea that reciprocity drives social exchange theory implies that people engage in a relationship if the outcome of such engagement is greater than their effort" (p. 55).

Rutti, Helms, and Rose (2013) use the concept of social exchange theory as presented by Fiske to explore and further understand mentoring relationships within the business context. According to the authors, "social exchange assumes a barter of costs for benefits between rationally self-interested individuals" (p. 453). According to their findings, people utilize three strategies when engaging in "exchange-based relationships" (p. 454). These strategies call for each party to reciprocate favors, forgive the other individual if they do not act accordingly, and provide some level of accountability and recourse if the other party is inconsistent in their actions. Findings from Rutti et al.

suggest that appropriate mentor matches that consider multiple factors—including diversity—are essential to a successful exchange relationship.

Although the primary theoretical framework for this study is grounded on the philosophy of efficacy research, one cannot ignore the role that costs and benefits play as teachers consider engaging in mentor relationships. It is the suggestion of the researcher that prior social exchanges within the mentor context help to form the mastery experiences of teachers who serve in such roles.

Examination of Empirical Studies

A review of the literature reveals multiple studies that address the benefit of mentoring for pre-service teachers and for classroom teachers. In addition, there is significant research on the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. However, the literature on teacher efficacy and mentoring is limited, especially as it correlates with mentor understanding of roles and formal preparation. The following chart shows a summary of empirical findings in the areas of mentor benefits, mentor preparation, and teacher efficacy. It also includes studies on the use of situated learning and community of practice as a model of site-based learning, the value of shared supervision, and supporting mentor affective commitment. These empirical findings highlight the need for additional research addressing the relationship between teacher efficacy and engagement with mentoring, as well as understanding these relationships within a professional development school setting. Findings from these studies provided guidance for the research study at Fredrick Brown Elementary.

Table 1

Empirical Findings Chart

Author(s), Date, Title	Purpose	Method(s)	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusion	Implication(s)
Allen, J. M., Ambrosetti, A., & Turner, D. (2013) How school and university supervising staff perceive the pre-service teacher education practicum: A comparative study	To compare research findings from two Australian universities on factors that contribute to experiences of pre-service teachers during their practicum	Comparative study of data from two previous studies	Queensland school sample had 36 schools with 242 practitioners; Tasmanian study included 166 participants from a more expansive geographical area	3 themes: connection of coursework to the practicum experience; benefit of effective school-university partnership that supports clear roles and responsibilities; necessity of open and meaningful communication between stakeholders for strong partnership to occur	Effective mentoring requires schools and universities to work together on roles and responsibilities of all parties.	It is critical that schools and universities work closely together to develop mentor programs. There must be frequent, open dialogue and a true partnership.
Ambrosetti, A. (2014) Are you ready to be a mentor? Preparing teachers for mentoring pre-service teachers	To determine the role of professional development in providing mentors with the skills needed to effectively mentor	Qualitative study that used surveys to access participants' feelings after completing a mentor course	11 teachers (9 female, 2 male); 9 taught in primary schools and 2 in secondary; 9 had taught for more than 15 years and 2 for less than five years	Surveys showed a changed understanding of mentoring and a change in mentoring practices; mentors gained greater appreciation for complexity of mentoring roles and the importance of relationships	Preparation for mentoring results in positive changes in mentor practices. Various roles exist for mentors, but they can change depending on the complexity of needs. Changes in understanding of mentoring resulted in mentors preparing more for the process.	Formalized mentoring programs are needed to provide teachers with an understanding of their roles and the skills needed to effectively mentor. Findings support efforts to make good "fits" with pairings.

Cope, P., Cuthbertson, P., & Stoddart, B. (2000) Situated learning in the practice placement	To examine how nurses learn during their practice placements	Qualitative case study based on interviews with surveys (Scotland)	10% of two cohorts of nursing students—total of 30 participants (11 and 19 in the two cohorts)	Nurse education is a practice area that encompasses components of situated learning that help the student cognitively and socially	The role of cognitive apprenticeship and communities of practice were explored. Basing mentor roles on situated learning principles can be critical to the professional development of nurses.	Study results are relevant to a mentor study due to the concept of social acceptance and its extension to professional acceptance. The study reiterates the role of relationships and how they relate to professional advancement.
Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2010) Mentor educators' understandings of mentoring pre-service primary teachers	To gain an understanding of mentors' reasons for mentoring, the characteristics of a good mentor, and the benefits and issues of the mentoring process	Qualitative study combining surveys, questionnaires, and recorded focus group sessions	Fourteen educators, most in leadership roles (1 worked with students with learning difficulties); 4 males, 10 females; all were experienced mentors	3 categories of motivation: influencing pre-service teacher education, personal professional development from mentoring, and supporting mentors within the school; identified need for having common understanding of language and terms; benefit of having extra support in the classroom	There were many motivators and benefits identified for mentoring. Ways to improve the process were given. University faculty are critical in resolving issues as they arise.	There is a great need for stronger university-school collaboration grounded in frequent communication. Professional learning and clearly articulated expectations would benefit all stakeholders.
Lejonberg, E., & Christophersen, K. A. (2015) School-based mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role: Role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience as antecedents	To examine factors that influence affective commitment to mentoring	Qualitative study utilizing a self-report survey given during lectures	146 mentors from university mentor education programs in Norway; varied years of teaching experience; 74% had completed at least 15 credits of mentor education	Mentor education had greater effect on affective commitment than did role clarity; however, role clarity had strong relationship with self efficacy; self efficacy is positively correlated to commitment; mentor experience had lower connection to commitment	In relation to social exchange, this study highlights how affective commitment relates to mentors' role in exchange, but it does not consider what is needed from the mentee in exchange. Extensive mentor training programs support efficacy, role clarity, and affective commitment.	Implications of this study include the need to further examine the relationship between role clarity and teacher efficacy and how role clarity can be an integrated component of mentor education.
Mesler, N. A. (2004). The shared	To better understand how shared supervision between a	Qualitative case study with surveys of teachers at a PDS school	7 mentor teachers and university supervisors	Positive survey results regarding feelings toward shared supervision and benefits; shared supervision	Although there was a limited sample size, benefits are evident for joint supervision. Two	This study provided insight into the essential nature of the relationship between university and

supervision of student teachers: Leadership, listening, and lessons learned	university supervisor and classroom teacher was implemented in a PDS setting			provides for empowerment of classroom teacher; sharing supervision with the classroom teacher, university supervisor had time to be more engaged in other aspects of the school	perspectives provided more feedback to student teachers and greater availability of university supervisor to assist when needed.	school-based supervisors to effectively mentor pre-service teachers. Suggestion included a course on supervision for classroom teachers and clear role definition.
Sayeski, K. L., & Paulsen, K. J. (2012) Student teacher evaluations of cooperating teachers as indices of mentoring	To identify practices that student teachers reported as beneficial to their professional growth	Qualitative study of perception evaluations using an online content analysis tool titled Cooperating Teacher Evaluation	400 student teachers over a period of three years; all were enrolled in master's program in English, math, social studies, science, or foreign language education	Common practices were identified by student teachers as beneficial in the categories of preplanning, sharing of resources, constructive/specific feedback, multi-modal feedback, modeling of effective practices, and practices demonstrating trust and confidence	Effective mentoring requires multiple categories of support for pre-service teachers. Findings support recommendations in literature on how to effectively mentor.	Study offers clear guidance on the type of practices from which mentees report receiving the greatest benefit. There is a need to further examine the role of "technical-rational" support, tension between providing guidance and allowing mentee to find his or her own way, and the relationship between good teachers and successful mentors.
Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers	To determine which factors have the greatest influence on efficacy of novice and veteran teachers	Qualitative study using surveys and self-rating scales	255 teacher volunteers and teachers who were enrolled in graduate school	Novice teachers reported lower self efficacy than did experienced teachers; considered correlation between efficacy and tenure in profession	Mastery experiences had the greatest effect on efficacy for novice and veteran teachers.	Consideration should be given to the assignment of pre-service teachers to novice teachers due to their own self efficacy not being established early in their teaching career.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature provided a deeper awareness of the importance of mentor understanding of the roles and skills needed to effectively accomplish the expectations that others have of them. Examination of self-efficacy and teacher-efficacy literature reiterated the significance of mastery and vicarious experiences in mitigating the costs of mentoring. The empirical studies used as a foundation for this inquiry highlighted the following themes that support the aim of this action research:

1. Successful pre-service education requires strong a school-university partnership with clear roles and responsibilities.
2. Mentor preparation programs result in greater understanding of mentor roles and the importance of relationships between mentor and mentee.
3. Professional development within the setting of practice can have meaningful benefits as workers learn from each other.
4. When surveyed, mentor teachers acknowledge multiple benefits to mentoring.
5. Mentor teacher efficacy is directly correlated to role commitment.
6. Pre-service candidates value constructive feedback and modeling from mentors.

In summary, the literature review offers a basis for action research at Fredrick Brown Elementary. The overall themes echo the need to provide mentor teachers with professional learning so that they are better equipped to engage in the activities associated with their roles. The use of the community of practice model is supported in literature as an effective means for professionals to learn vicariously from others who have had similar experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As explained in detail in chapter one, the purpose of this action research study was to improve the mentoring experience for mentors and mentees by reducing the costs and increasing the benefits of and efficacy for the role. The study answers the following questions: (1) What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?, (2) What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?, and (3) In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teachers in their role as mentor?

Case Study Design

Action Research

Action research case study was the methodology for the mentor teacher project at Fredrick Brown Elementary School. In order to effectively examine the problem of practice, two action research team—planning and intervention—worked collaboratively to plan and implement professional learning. During the construction phase of the action research cycle, the planning team reviewed literature and archival documents to frame the identified problem of practice. The team proposed that the more efficacious teachers were for the mentoring role, the more engaged they would be with the process. The team also planned focus group sessions to solicit feedback from teachers on the benefits and challenges of mentoring and related professional learning needs. The intervention team worked as co-constructors of the problem and proposed interventions as they openly

engaged in dialogue during the focus group meetings. In addition, because of the community of practice model, teachers served as facilitators and participants concurrently during each meeting session.

Action Research Methodology

According to Simons (2009), case study has a "focus on studying a single case in depth interpreted in a specific socio/cultural/political setting" (p. 3). This study used qualitative case study design to research the needs of mentor teachers in a professional development school setting. Although there is a plethora of studies on the needs of both mentors and pre-service candidates, very few examine the phenomenon within the context of a professional development schools partnership. The action research method is appropriate for this study because the goals of such research are "to solve a problem and to contribute to science" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 48).

The action research team utilized existing research and teacher responses during focus group sessions to develop professional learning to improve teacher efficacy for mentoring. In addition to the focus groups, the intervention team participated in communities of practice professional learning sessions and interviews with the action research team. To evaluate the effectiveness of the professional learning sessions, the action research team developed an interview protocol to capture participant perceptions after the sessions.

Intervention and Implementation Plans

The action research team reviewed extensive literature and initial responses from participants to develop interventions that addressed the problem of practice. More specifically, the team worked from the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks to

gain an understanding of factors that impact mentor efficacy and to design professional learning that relied on the professional knowledge of participants within their community of learners. The chosen research questions served as a focal point of guidance for the action research team as we worked together to develop the most appropriate interventions.

The action research team was comprised the school principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, university, and an additional professor who works closely with Fredrick Brown Elementary and district-level PDS initiatives. The team reviewed existing literature on the needs of pre-service candidates and mentor teachers. In addition, some members attended related sessions at the National Professional Development Schools annual conference and shared their findings with other team members. Archival data, gathered during monthly seminar meetings with mentors, was also used to deepen research team members' understanding of the problem of practice and of the perceptions of mentors regarding how to strengthen the training provided to them.

Ambrosetti (2012) developed a four-session mentor training module to address professional learning needs that she had identified through her research. According to her findings, it is essential that mentors have a strong understanding of their roles and the related skills needed to effectively support pre-service candidates. Based on her design, the action research team planned its first intervention as a focus group session with mentors to assess their thoughts regarding the benefits and challenges of mentoring and areas where they felt the need for additional support and training. In keeping with Ambrosetti's model, the team used the information gained during the focus group to plan

subsequent professional learning sessions that aligned to research and participant-identified needs. One of these sessions was a full-day meeting held during the summer, and the remainder were held monthly during the school day with teacher release time provided by pre-service teachers who are assigned to their classes.

Interviews to Collect and Analyze Data

Initial data collection was achieved through the audio recording of focus group sessions. The action research team developed a questioning protocol to guide the conversations of the two focus groups and to ensure that similar discussions were held with the different groups. Two groups were chosen in order to maintain a size that allowed for meaningful participation among all members. Additional data were gathered through a recording of the July professional learning session. Although the primary aim of the session was to provide new information to mentors, the community of practice model encouraged group sharing of best practices and related concerns through a structured facilitation of dialogue and activities. Subsequent critical incident questions were sent to participants via Google Forms after each courageous conversations session. These were sessions designed to improve mentor teachers' confidence in having conversations about uncomfortable topics. End-of-intervention interviews were held with all participants based on an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved protocol designed to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning provided during the semester and its impact on efficacy for mentoring.

Criteria for Selected Interventions

The action research team met multiple times during the beginning stages of the research to review literature, discuss personal observations, and determine the most

appropriate research questions to address the problem of practice. As the team moved forward in the action research process, guidance was provided through the review of findings from multiple authors who have studied action research design. A particular point of reference was from Coghlan and Brannick (2014), who suggest that "when the desired future state is articulated, you then attend to the present reality and ask: What is it in the present that needs changing in order to move to the desired future state?" Thus, the criteria for the selection of interventions were based on the action research team working collaboratively to clearly express the desired end goals of the intervention.

Keeping in mind the above-referenced recommendation of Coghlan and Brannick (2014), the action research team designed interventions that would address the research aim of increasing teacher efficacy for mentoring by initiating community of practice professional learning sessions. The team maintained a focus on the realities of research within a work organization and strove to design interventions that could be job-embedded and relevant to the daily work of teachers. Interventions were designed with the aim of providing support aligned to mentor-identified needs. It was the belief of the action research team that appropriately designed professional learning would help to generate the data needed to determine if efficacy indeed increased. Final criteria of the chosen interventions related to the realistic time constraints of the research project. In an effort to maintain teacher interest and research timelines, the goal was to develop interventions that could be implemented within one semester, while still having significant impact on professional practice.

Support From the Literature

Support for the chosen interventions can be found throughout the literature on mentoring pre-service teachers. There is an abundance of studies that focus on the importance of mentor teachers being reflective in their practice and on the value of mentor professional learning in preparing mentors for their role. Simoncini et al. (2014) suggest that professional dialogue is an essential component of reflective practice and that the two practices work together to transform learning. Their research found that some pre-service teachers benefitted from being exposed to beliefs that conflicted with those that they personally held.

Ambrosetti (2012) addresses the lack of preparation for mentor teachers by suggesting that "mentoring has not been a priority in many pre-service teacher education programs" (p. 3). Hudson and Hudson (2010) concur with this finding, noting that "mentors require professional development to help mentees reflect effectively on their teaching" (p. 158). These researchers continue by suggesting that "there is inadequate education to prepare mentors on how to develop effective primary teachers" (p. 158). Effective mentoring is a purposeful and carefully thought-out process. It requires more than simply modeling instructional strategies and routine activities like making copies and completing report cards. Instead, mentors must learn to objectively analyze their own practices and perspectives and then help the mentees to engage in the same exercise of self-reflection (Cooper, 2013; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Yaman, 2013).

Conclusion of the Intervention Plan

The current iteration of the intervention plan was based on the action research team's review of literature and analysis of feedback from the mentor teacher focus group

sessions. The intervention plan was comprehensive, yet time-limited in order to support a cycle of inquiry that can be completed within a school year. As additional data were collected, minor modifications were made to the plan in an effort to provide appropriate support for the participants and to address the problem of practice. Finally, because the research was embedded within our own organization, the team was cognizant of the other professional demands that teachers face and attempted to design interventions that were meaningful without being overwhelming. Figure 2 provides a concise graphic representation of the method used to collect data on mentor professional learning needs and the corresponding interventions designed to address their articulated challenges. More extensive details of the intervention plan and related processes are reflected in Table 2.

Figure 2. Intervention graphic.

Table 2

Intervention Plan

Proposed Intervention	Action Research Team Activities (what the team will do)	Anticipated Outcomes/Connection to problem/theoretical framework	Proposed Timeline	What data will be collected to evaluate the intervention?
Mentor Teacher Focus Groups	The action research team used literature and documents from previous mentor meetings to design questions for the focus group. The team analyzed the data for themes and results were used to design teacher professional learning sessions.	Review of literature on the importance of mentor engagement in the process suggests that the focus groups should provide insight into the needs of mentors. The expected outcome is that insights will be gathered regarding what supports are needed to improve the mentor experience. The opportunity for teachers to express their needs should result in greater buy-in to interventions.	Jan. – March 2016 – planning May, 2016 – Focus Group	Focus groups sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. The action research team will analyze the data and identify themes in the areas of benefits, barriers, and professional learning needs. These data were compared to notes from archived mentor seminars conducted by our school.
Mentoring 2.0 Professional Learning	The action research team reviewed the transcripts from the focus group sessions and then identified Faith Central University professors who had experience in the areas mentioned with greatest frequency. In addition, the team decided to expand the PL to monthly sessions focused on courageous conversations because the topic included a variety of concerns expressed by participants.	The theoretical framework of communities of practice was the foundation for this intervention. Although "expert" facilitators were chosen to lead the sessions, the format was such that teachers shared their experiences, successes, and strategies with each other. The professional learning model also correlated with efficacy premises of teachers benefitting from not only their own mastery experiences, but through vicarious experiences with other professionals.	The initial session was held in July 2016, and monthly sessions were scheduled for August, September, and October.	Field notes were collected during the focus group session for data analysis. These notes were compared to focus group notes, monthly feedback interviews, and end-of-semester and intervention interviews.
Monthly Courageous Conversations Sessions/ Mentoring The Mentor Follow-up Sessions	The action research team met with a professor who had experience in facilitating courageous conversations discussions and reflective practice. Team members co-facilitated the sessions with the professor by sharing mastery experiences.	As with Mentoring 2.0, these sessions were designed from a communities of practice model. The facilitator's goal was to guide discussions among participants that led them to reflect on their own practices (a critical component of effective mentoring in the literature) and to share strategies with each other.	August, September, and October, 2016	The data from the end-of- semester interviews were used to show the effectiveness of interventions.

Inquiry

The action research team of Fredrick Brown Elementary chose to engage in collective inquiry as a means of strengthening the professional development schools partnership by improving teacher experiences as mentors. In order to adequately address the problem of practice, the team agreed to maintain transparent discussions and preserve openness in order to objectively seek answers. The team engaged in a journey of discovery as we sought to answer the stated research questions and other questions that arose throughout the process. The inquiry process involved reviewing literature and anecdotal data as well as teacher feedback provided during focus group sessions. Meeting and interview transcripts were analyzed to determine if the chosen interventions supported greater efficacy for mentors.

Research Plan

The following questions, as referenced previously, were answered in this case study:

- What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?
- What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?
- In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teachers' efficacy as mentors?

Table 3 explains the data collected for each research question, as well as the method of analysis.

Table 3

Research Plan

Research Question	*Anticipated Data to be Collected*	*Analysis Approach*	*Timeline*
What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?	• Focus group • Community of practice field notes • Mentor teacher meeting notes • Faith Central University mentor appreciation meeting notes	Coding Document analysis Member checking	Archived Data May 2016
What are perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?	• Focus group • Community of practice field notes	Coding Document analysis Member checking	Archived Data May 2016
In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teachers in their role as mentor?	• Critical incident individual electronic responses to identify significant moment during follow-up sessions of monthly PL • End-of-semester interviews assessing changes in understanding of roles and sense of efficacy for mentoring • Planning meeting documents for professional learning and courageous conversations sessions	Coding Document analysis Member checking	August 2016 September 2016 October 2016 December 2016

Data on the Action Research Process

Research Sample

Participants in the action research project met the following criteria:

- Employed as a teacher at Fredrick Brown Elementary for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years
- Veteran teacher (defined as having three or more years of certified teaching experience)
- Have mentored a pre-service candidate for at least two years
- Volunteered to participate in the action research process

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the beginning of the study. Each participant signed a consent form that clearly outlined the aim of the action research, expectations for participation, and a description of how data would be obtained and analyzed to generate findings. Other teachers who only participated in the focus group portion of the study also received and signed informed consent documents. Due to our partnership with Faith Central University, teachers were personally committed to the outcomes and success of the action research project. Their individual obligations as mentors contributed to a desire to impact the success of the intervention and resulted in ownership of the process. As principal of the school, I worked diligently to remain conscientious of my dual roles as researcher and participant. In an effort to maintain objectivity, I frequently engaged in member checking with both action research team, and I am cognizant of the impact that my role potentially has on findings of the study.

Research team participants were recruited through district a email that contained an attachment with a detailed description of the study. A Google form was used for

teachers to complete if they were interested in participating in the focus groups or the entire action research project. A copy of the recruitment document, sent on April 25, 2016, is included in Appendix D of this paper.

Data Collection Methods

In order to effectively answer the research questions for this study, multiple data sources were collected and analyzed. The initial source of information gathering for the study was a May mentor teacher focus group. During this session, a questioning protocol was utilized to solicit teacher thoughts about the benefits and hindrances of mentoring. In addition, teachers were able to share ideas about what professional learning was needed to increase their efficacy for mentoring. This focus group session was audio recorded and I listened to the recordings, transcribed what was said, and reviewed the transcripts multiple times to identify themes in the data. The identified themes were used as the basis for developing our first mentor professional learning session held in July. During this session, teacher feedback was recorded and field notes were taken by two of our action research team members. These notes were used for further action research team conversation and to substantiate earlier findings from the focus group sessions.

Courageous conversations sessions were held in August, September, and October and were facilitated by a university professor. After each session, participants were asked to complete Google forms to journal critical incidents that they identified as a result of the meeting topics discussed. At the end of the semester, each intervention participant participated in a semi-structured interview with the action research facilitator. These sessions were audio recorded and transcribed for themes and findings. The protocol for these interviews is included in Appendix C. Twelve teachers signed consent

forms to participate in this action research study and agreed to have each session recorded. However, only nine teachers participated in the entire research project.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of data is critical so that the researcher can "organize and make sense of the data in order to produce findings and an overall understanding (or theory) of the case" (Simons, 2009, p. 117). Data for this action research project were analyzed through coding of transcripts from the focus group meetings and interviews. Field notes and recordings from the summer professional learning and four courageous conversations sessions were reviewed as additional sources of data. I also utilized document analysis to seek other sources that supported the findings from participant interviews and offered additional insights into the needs of mentor teachers. Each of these data sources served as a mechanism by which to ensure trustworthiness and validity of data.

Descriptive coding was used to analyze the interview and meeting transcripts in order to identify themes in responses of participants. After codes were determined, key quotes from the transcripts were identified, printed, and then placed into descriptive categories based on commonalities of thought around each research question. Once I physically arranged the quotes by similar wording or thought, I created an Excel spreadsheet with respondents' names placed vertically and the descriptors stated horizontally. Participant responses that aligned with each code were placed on the spreadsheet so that I could visually assess the frequency of responses for each category and accurately determine themes for each area.

Due to the number of codes developed in the first cycle, I chose to engage in a second cycle of coding. According to Saldana (2013), The primary goal during Second

Cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes" (p. 207). I used pattern coding for my second cycle review to further generalize the codes into broader themes that could be drawn from the study. A similar strategy was utilized as with my first round by charting themes and quotations from transcripts in order to look for connections and potentially causal relationships between the coded phrases. As I created potential themes, I reviewed the data to seek confirmation of the proposed categories. After careful review of the data, I was able to develop three clearly substantiated themes for each research question. Data presented in chapter five detail responses of action research participants and show alignment with identified themes.

Validity of Research and Trustworthiness of Data

Simons (2009) examines the importance of validity in research from the lens of authenticity. The author references Guba and Lincoln's premises of "fairness, respecting participant's perspectives and empowering them to act" (Simons, 2009, p. 128). Similarly, Stake (2006) examines the role of triangulation in case studies, noting that the role of triangulation is "to assure that we have the picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases, and not likely to mislead the reader greatly" (p. 77).

Multiple sources of data collection were incorporated to ensure validity of research through triangulation. The closeness of researchers to the case lends itself to potential bias. Thus, the action research team members collected archival data, focus group transcripts, and field notes as a means of cross-checking findings and noting common responses and themes. The various forms of data collected assisted the research

team in determining "whether the new views are consistent with what is already well known about the case" (Stake, 2006, p. 77). Member checking was also used as a strategy of validating the facilitator's interpretations of participant responses. These assisted the researcher in maintaining objectivity regarding findings and providing meaningful results to participants.

Timeline of the Study

The action research team began informal information-gathering sessions during the winter of 2016. Once approval from the IRB was received, the team began the official process by inviting teachers to participate in the study and by planning the first focus group session for May 2016. Subsequent professional learning and data collection were planned for the summer and fall of 2016, allowing for a full semester of teacher mentoring after the acquisition of new knowledge while receiving ongoing monthly support through courageous conversations. Action research was completed in December 2016, and data analysis continued into the winter of 2017. As research facilitator, I will present all findings to Means County School District administrators and Faith Central University faculty in a written narrative and oral presentation in May 2017.

Limitations of Action Research

Action research proved to be a highly effective tool for the examination of mentor preparation and efficacy at Fredrick Brown Elementary School. Feedback from focus group meetings, professional learning sessions, and interviews offered meaningful insights to guide future actions taken by the professional development school partnership. The structure provided by the courageous conversations facilitator aided in removing possible inhibitions, as he framed conversations in a manner that promoted open and

honest dialogue. In addition, school and university administrators modeled openness by acknowledging socially and politically charged feelings. Although the action research planning team was pleased with the contribution of teachers during each session, we recognized that complete transparency was possibly hindered by the presence of school-level and university-level administrators.

An additional limitation of the study relates to the timeframe of implementation. Some teachers who initially signed informed consent and participated in the focus group meetings were not available for summer professional learning. One teacher also accepted a position in another city and was removed from the study. Another time limitation was the actual duration of the study. One semester of intervention did allow teachers to participate in five community of practice sessions and approximately fourteen weeks of mentoring. However, the learning and mentoring occurred concurrently. In order to truly assess the impact of mentor teacher learning, it would be beneficial to measure teacher perception of efficacy over a longer period of time and with different groups of pre-service candidates.

Subjectivity Statement

As members of the action research team conducting research in our own professional setting, we maintained an awareness of our dual roles throughout the process. More specifically, as principal of the school and members of the Faith Central University faculty, we recognized that we had a strong vested interest in the problem of practice and development of related solutions. According to Simons (2009), "Subjectivity is inevitable in research, and therefore not something we can eliminate" (p. 83). In consideration of the inherent nature of subjectivity, the authors urge researchers

to embrace its' realities and instead determine how it may impact the research process and findings. By acknowledging my dual role as researcher within my own organization, I heightened my awareness of potential bias and forced myself to be more cognizant of actions. The use of a personal research journal was a useful tool for my ongoing consideration of personal beliefs and how these potential issues were resolved.

The ethical completion of the study was imperative to the validity of the research and the application of findings to other schools within our district. In light of our personal interests in the study, the team sought to incorporate a variety of methodological tools to maintain objectivity with our research. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) acknowledge the difficulties of action research, noting that "the challenge for action researchers is to engage in both making the action happen and to stand back from the action and reflect on it as it happens" (p. 48). While action research does pose challenges due to issues of subjectivity, the model is ideal for teachers and school leaders seeking to develop practical solutions to professional problems of practice. By involving teachers in the process within their own work setting, the action research team was able to explore learning supports in the context in which they were needed.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY— STORY OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

The impetus for this action research project began while I was in my second semester of the doctoral program. I was participating in discussions about the professional development schools partnership, potential mentor recognition options, and mentor professional learning. In addition, many informal conversations occurred in my office where mentors expressed their exhaustion and frustration with hosting pre-service candidates. Yet, when I suggested that we reduce the number of candidates we hosted each semester, teachers would immediately begin to defend the value of their presence. After engaging in conversations with our about the strong dichotomy of feelings expressed by teachers about mentoring, I decided to engage a group of teachers in action research about increasing the benefits and reducing the costs of their position.

Description of the Context

Fredrick Brown Elementary is a charter school in the Means County School District. Located in the northern quadrant of town, the school is located in a residential area and is not accessible by public transportation or within walking distance for most families. As the district's newest elementary school, teachers from across the district were eager to become a part of the county's first charter initiative. Currently, there are 566 students enrolled in Fredrick Brown in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth. During the 2016-17 school year, the school comprised 60% Hispanic students, 32% African

American students, 5% White students, and 3% students who are categorized as multiracial.

Located in a newly constructed building, Fredrick Brown is situated in an open area of land without much foliage. When visitors arrive on the campus, students can be seen playing on the basketball court or the adjoining playscapes. Our learning shelters have been built by a community organization to serve as shade for students and teachers when they are outside. Once inside the building, parents, students, teachers, and visitors are welcomed by colorful student artwork and smiling faces of eager learners. If people listen closely, they will notice that conversations frequently occur in Spanish as well as in English.

As school-age students and parents arrive in the car rider entrance, they are joined by waves of college-age young adults. Depending on the day of the week, between 25 and 40 pre-service candidates embark upon the school loaded with computers, bookbags, smiles, and chatter. Some of these students also participate in university-level courses held on the Fredrick Douglas campus.

Fredrick Douglas has 47 certified staff members who range from beginning teachers to those with thirty years of experience. The average number of years of experience is 15 years, with many younger teachers who were hired as a result of the professional development school partnership. Of the 30 homeroom teachers, all except four host some level of pre-service candidates in their classroom. The requirement for all certified teachers with three or more years of experience to serve as mentors to pre-service candidates can be daunting. Although all teachers were hired with a clear understanding of the PDS partnership, many did not consider the possibility of mentoring

every year without any respite. Consequently, some teachers have begun to express frustrations with the demands on their time and the expectations of their role. As school leader, I serve as an advocate for teachers and a member of the district professional development schools steering committee. These two roles can be complimentary and adversarial. In recognition of the value of hosting pre-service candidates and of the challenges that can accompany this role, I solicited support from key players to serve as the action research team for my study. Members of the action research team have collaborated to design a study that identifies the perceived benefits and barriers to mentoring pre-service candidates and develops a professional learning module that is responsive to articulated needs.

Action Research Team Members

After carefully reviewing literature on mentor teachers' understanding of and preparation for their roles, I determined that action research was an appropriate mechanism by which to better support the teachers of Fredrick Brown Elementary. In order to begin exploring the problem of practice, I solicited support from our school assistant principal, instructional coach, university , and district-level professional development schools committee member. This group provided representation from the school and university perspectives.

Recruiting Interested[2] Intervention Participants

The process used to recruit Fredrick Brown teachers for the action research study was outlined in detail in chapter three. In order to ensure diversity of thought, I actively solicited teachers from each grade level of the school. The action research team supported this goal and acknowledged that teacher styles and personalities are sometimes

[2] The names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

aligned with the grades that they choose to serve. By having a representation from all grade levels, we were able to ensure a more diverse sample of mentors. The initial focus groups' attendance and engagement reflected an interest in the research topic and a desire to improve the mentor experience for university students and teachers. On May 9, 2016, the first two focus groups were held, with 15 teachers participating. During these meetings, I shared the impetus for my research, related literature, the research problem, and the study purpose and questions. I also informed teachers of the anticipated timeline for the study and projected interventions and time commitment for their participation. At this time, all 15 teachers signed the consent to participate and agreed to attend the July professional learning session and monthly follow-up sessions.

Background of Participants

During the initial conception of the action research project, thirteen teachers agreed to participate in the focus group. However, four participants withdrew due to leaving the district, inability to participate in the summer professional learning, or conflicts with the monthly courageous conversations sessions. Below is a brief description of the participants who participated in all components of the action research study.

Carmen Smith. Carmen is a relatively new teacher with six years of teaching experience. She taught in public and private pre-kindergarten for four years and has worked as a kindergarten teacher for two years. She has been enrolled in graduate school and is completing her master's degree in elementary education this year. As a younger teacher, Carmen has been eager to learn more about the partnership and has embraced the concept of inquiry within practice. She was asked to mentor the first year that she was a

kindergarten teacher and was interested in the research study because she is not far removed from the role of pre-service teacher.

During the action research process, Carmen was always reflective about her role as mentor, and she frequently sought validation from another team member with similar professional experiences and personal interests. Carmen and Tammie are confidantes and could be seen affirming each other's feelings about their needs as mentors. Carmen remained optimistic throughout the study and often provided a fresh perspective on how to address the needs of pre-service candidates and teachers simultaneously. Carmen has extended her interest in inquiry beyond the action research project and has sought a grant to implement a study within her own classroom.

Carolyn Brown. Carolyn is a veteran teacher who has taught in two different counties over a course of twelve years. Currently an upper grades teacher, Carolyn is seen as one of the more outspoken faculty members at Fredrick Brown. She is very data-driven and enjoys reading about best practices and engaging in professional conversations regarding the effectiveness of practice. Carolyn is a team player, but will challenge instructional decisions when they conflict with what she considers research-based. It is her interest in research that led to her eagerness to participate in this action research project.

Carolyn enjoys working with pre-service candidates and willingly shares her content knowledge with them. She viewed the action research project as an opportunity to strengthen our work with all Block 3 and 4 students and to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of mentoring.

Tammie Nicholson. When I initially shared my research interests with my faculty, Tammie immediately approached me and expressed her interest in the topic of mentor preparation. As a somewhat new teacher, she recognized the value of the professional development partnership, but she also felt that greater preparation was needed to adequately serve in the capacity of mentor. Tammie has consistently shown interest participating in all aspects of the action research process. As a fifth-year teacher, Tammie currently serves on the district professional development committee and willingly shares her ideas for ways to improve the partnership.

Throughout the AR project, Tammie openly shared the benefits and challenges that she has faced with mentoring. During the intervention semester, Tammie began teaching in a new grade level and had a pre-service candidate placed in her classroom. The professional learning on mentoring skills and courageous conversations resonated with Tammie's immediate needs. During the sessions, she openly shared her struggles, strategies tried, and needs of her mentee.

Sandra Jackson. Sandra is one of the most senior members of the Fredrick Brown faculty and action research intervention team. Sandra has her specialist degree in educational leadership and an extensive repertoire of experience. She has taught multiple grade levels, worked as a school administrator, and served in various district curriculum committees.

As one of few African American teachers on faculty, Sandra provides a unique perspective to our work with Faith Central University and to our action research team. Sandra admittedly has a reputation of being strong-willed and comfortable with addressing difficult situations. Consequently, she provided a different perspective on the

challenges of mentoring and had different needs from the professional learning than many of her colleagues. During our three meetings, Sandra shared ideas for how she has dealt with courageous conversations in the past. She was equally reflective about whether her style could sometimes be viewed as too direct.

Angela Harris. Angela, the only other African American teacher on the action research intervention team, has her master's degree and nine years of experience. Angela is a strong instructional leader and serves on multiple district-level committees that focus on curriculum development. As a member of the school leadership team, Angela recognizes the importance of focused instruction, and she wants all individuals who serve Fredrick Brown children to share her passion for excellence. Her expectation for high levels of professional commitment extends beyond her certified colleagues to pre-service candidates who work within the school.

A very outgoing individual, Angela was very vocal during our sessions about her role as mentor and the sometimes conflicting abilities of pre-service candidates. In an animated and sometimes entertaining manner, Angela helped the group members to acknowledge some of their feelings and frustrations when mentor and mentee matches were less than ideal.

Megan Graham. Megan has eleven years of experience as a teacher. She is one of only two teachers who have been at Fredrick Brown since it opened in 2009. This position gives her a unique perspective, as she has watched the journey of the professional development partnership from its inception to maturity. Megan works diligently to mentor pre-service candidates as well as new teachers to the field or to her grade level. She consistently seeks creative strategies to improve student learning and to

connect with them emotionally. It is her desire for emotional connections that drove many of her conversations about seeking strategies to support pre-service candidates while maintaining relationships.

Megan was always engaged and maintained a genuineness that was refreshing for the group. Her candidness made everyone laugh, but also forced each member to openly reflect on his or her feelings about mentoring. During one of the initial sessions, Megan described the courageous conversations as "therapeutic," and she constantly stressed how such sessions would have helped all teachers when the school first opened. Megan's openness to growing as a mentor and professional helped her to actively embrace the goals of the action research intervention.

Leslie Wilson. Leslie is a twenty-year veteran teacher with a master's degree in early childhood education. She has served as a grade-level representative on the school improvement leadership team and has been very receptive to the PDS partnership and her role as a mentor. Leslie works diligently to ensure that the pre-service candidates that she mentors have meaningful experiences and that she provides thoughtful feedback.

Although Leslie is considered one of Fredrick Brown's strong mentor teachers, she was very reserved during the action research process. She participated in all three courageous conversations sessions, but her interactions and sharing were limited. Leslie expressed that while she is reluctant to initiate conversations related to more personal topics, she feels that her connections with pre-service candidates have been overall positive and without significant tensions.

Ashley Carson. Ashley is in her tenth year as a teacher and has worked at Fredrick Brown for the last eight years. All of her teaching experience has been in the

primary grades. She has served on the school leadership team and has also been a guest presenter in seminar sessions. Ashley is always open to opportunities to advance herself professionally, and she willingly shares her knowledge with team members and pre-service candidates.

Pleasant and outgoing, Ashley generally has minimal problems with her mentees. Yet, she eagerly participated in the intervention sessions and shared her ideas for ways to strengthen the skills of mentors. Although she has not had major issues with pre-service candidates assigned to her, she talked frankly about the challenges of engaging in courageous conversations. Ashley provided a sense of stability for the group as she maintained a healthy balance between acknowledging the trials of mentoring while also focusing on the many benefits.

June Sanders. June has worked as a teacher for fifteen years and has a specialist degree in education. June has also worked at Fredrick Brown Elementary since its opening. She has served as a mentor teacher for the last eight years and has frequently been asked to be a guest speaker for pre-service teacher seminars. June is a meticulous teacher who prides herself in strong relationships, timeliness, and adhering to policy. Her attention to detail and awareness of policy made her a valuable member of the action research intervention team. She helped team members maintain focus on the expectations and goals of the intervention, while also openly sharing her own experiences.

Although June is considered one of the most energetic and affective teachers at Fredrick Brown, her desire for perfection drives her to quickly address any issues that she may encounter with her pre-service candidates. During our courageous conversations

sessions, June shared concerns that she had in the past and methods that she enacted to address potential issues. She referred to the intervention sessions as "group therapy" and expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to talk with other mentors about how they resolved issues when they occurred.

Action Research Cycles

The action research planning team met every other week beginning in the winter of 2016. The team was charged with examining potential problems of practice within the context of the professional development school partnership that existed between Fredrick Brown Elementary and Faith Central University. Team members met and then solicited feedback from teacher partners in May 2016.

Coghlan and Brannick's work (2014) served as the theoretical underpinning for understanding the action research process within my own organization. The authors reference work by Reason and Marshall that focuses on the three audiences that research should appeal to. In expanding on their work, Coghlan and Brannick suggest the following:

> Second-person practice is primary. It is through working with others through collaborative processes of engaging in constructing the project, planning action, taking action, evaluating action and framing learning that individual (first person) learning takes place, and it is from that second and first experience and learning that actionable knowledge for a third person audience emerges. (p. 7)

I chose members for the action research team by seeking individuals who represented the different audiences that could benefit from a better understanding of the problem of practice. It was determined that the school-level and an additional university-

level faculty member could provide the insight needed from the perspective of the teacher education program. Fredrick Brown's assistant principal and instructional coach were asked to participate because they work closely with mentor teachers and pre-service teachers and frequently are the mediators when issues arise. In addition, they both work closely with the professor in residence to design professional learning to support both teachers and pre-service candidates. By working collaboratively, the action research team unearthed findings relevant to the field of education and the professional development schools community as a whole.

Once the action research team was developed, the members of the team spent time examining archival documents that captured feedback from school mentors and other related committees. The team also discussed literature that addressed the professional learning needs of mentor teachers and modules that had been developed by others who work in similar capacities. Team members shared their personal experiences and determined that a teacher focus group was a critical next step to accurately assessing the needs of mentor teachers.

Context and Purpose

The physical context of Fredrick Brown Elementary was described in detail in previous chapters and sections of this chapter. Yet, to fully understand the significance of this action research project, it is essential that a description be provided of the social and political context of the professional development school partnership that exists between Fredrick Brown and Faith Central University.

Social and Political Implications of PDS

According to the National Association of Professional Development Schools (2008), the purpose of such partnerships is "to accomplish a four-fold agenda: preparing future educators, providing current educators with ongoing professional development, encouraging joint school–university faculty investigation of education-related issues, and promoting the learning of P-12 student" (p. 1). Fredrick Brown Elementary and Faith Central University began planning for a new partnership in 2008 with organizational meetings and visits to other PDS sites. Fredrick Brown opened as Central School District's first PDS in 2009. With this opening came much excitement and anticipation coupled with ambiguity about roles and expectations.

Eager to learn more about what it meant to become a PDS, members of Faith Central University and Central School District visited multiple sites across the eastern United States. Each site visit provided a different perspective on what it meant to become a professional development district. Stakeholders began to work together to create a vision for the local partnership and a framework for organizing efforts. Teachers hired to work at Fredrick Brown were briefed during interviews about the PDS initiative and the related expectation to mentor pre-service candidates. There was an overwhelming excitement about the potential to work collaboratively with the local university and to impact teacher preparation.

Over the course of two years, the partnership expanded and greater numbers of pre-service candidates were being placed at Fredrick Brown. University faculty presented a proposal to school and district administrators to place a cohort of students within the school for their Block 3 and Block 4 placements. This model would allow pre-

service candidates to work for an entire year in one setting and ideally with one mentor. The benefits of such a program design were immediately apparent. There would be more adults to work with Fredrick Brown students, relationships would have more time to develop between mentors and mentees, pre-service candidates would receive a true picture of the entire school year within one building, and university faculty could provide greater support.

While the benefits were significant, initial thought was not given to the challenges that would also accompany such a model. Yet, the community was watching and waiting to see if the model would be successful. The political and social ramifications could be significant. In addition, although teachers had committed to the role of mentor, they did not realize how cumbersome the task could become. In an effort to be politically appropriate and respectful of the partnership, Fredrick Brown faculty were hesitant to acknowledge the issues that accompanied the placement of such an abundance of pre-service candidates. Consequently, the apprehension to openly discuss concerns led to assumptions regarding what was needed by mentors in order to make their experiences more palatable. The willingness of the action research team to openly acknowledge barriers and identify targeted professional learning supports had the potential to positively impact teacher commitment to the role of mentor.

Desired Outcomes of the Project

While planning for this action research project, I engaged in multiple conversations with district and university faculty regarding the needs of mentor teachers in Central School District. An apparent theme that surfaced from all conversations was the need to expand the current level of professional learning support provided to mentors.

Faith Central University professors had focused on the co-teaching model and working as pairs for professional learning topics for the past five years. However, feedback from teachers, current mentor literature and information received at national PDS conferences had pointed to the need for more specific training on the roles and responsibilities of mentors.

University and school-level partners desired to see an increase in teacher commitment to and satisfaction with mentoring as a result of greater efficacy for the role. More specifically, the aim of the research project was to hear teacher voices regarding their learning needs and to develop a learning module that addressed identified hindrances to mentor engagement. By developing a responsive intervention, teacher efficacy for mentoring would increase, engagement would be greater, and field placements would be stronger.

Ownership of the Team Members

All Fredrick Brown Elementary teachers who have three or more years of professional experience are assigned to the role of mentor. Because of this expectation, teachers were vested in the action research project as a means of impacting the success of their roles. Prior to the beginning of the study, teachers spoke candidly with school administration and the university about the benefits and challenges of their position. Research team participants volunteered to participate in the study after a meeting where I shared the identified problem of practice and the steps of the action research process. Intervention team members were actively engaged in the steps of constructing the problem and taking action. Action research planning team members participated in all components of the cycle.

In order to effectively conduct action research within my own organization, I followed the process outlined by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). They describe their process in this way: "For the context of doing research in your own organization we present an action research cycle comprising a pre-step, context and purpose and four basic steps: constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action" (p. 9). These cycles were used to guide the planning and implementation of the action research intervention.

Constructing: September 2015 – January 2016

The action research planning team began constructing the problem of practice by examining archival documents from previous meetings with mentor teachers. During these sessions, teachers discussed the progress of their work with the pre-service candidates assigned to their classrooms and shared any issues of concern. Construction of the problem began as an informal process in which team members talked openly about the challenges of mentoring that had been shared with them by mentors and mentees. As stated by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), "The first step of the action research cycle is a dialogic activity in which the stakeholders of the project engage in constructing what the issues are, however provisionally, as a working theme, on the basis of which action will be planned and taken" (p. 10).

A critical component of the authors' explanation of the process is recognizing that identification of the issues can be provisional. This awareness allowed the research team to objectively review literature related to the problem of practice, as well as feedback provided by mentor teachers. In addition, team members recognized that their own assumptions about the needs of mentors were not necessarily the reality. Consequently, it

was imperative that all team members remained open in their dialogue in order to examine issues and accurately construct the related problem of practice.

Planning Action: February 2016 – June 2016

Once the action research planning team evaluated the feedback provided by mentor teachers during the focus groups, the findings were merged with information obtained from other meeting documents and related literature. In following with Coghlan and Brannick (2014), the research team recognized that "planning action follows from exploration of the context and purpose of the project, and construction of the issue, and is consistent with them" (p. 11). Thus, the planning team met monthly from February through June to review meeting transcripts and summarize teacher responses into categories for professional learning sessions. Four general themes were identified as the team summarized teacher responses. In an effort to support the community of practice model, the team brainstormed university faculty who could facilitate collaborative discussions in each of the four areas.

In a change from the construction of problem stage, the action team deviated from the initial plan of offering a full day of summer professional learning and monthly sessions that addressed each of the four themes in greater detail. Instead, analysis of focus group responses led the team to determine that one full day was needed to provide support in the areas of adult learning, supervision of instruction, and understanding the roles of mentors**.** In addition, it was decided that the intervention team would benefit from more extensive sessions on courageous conversations. A leader was identified to lead these sessions with the team every three weeks.

Taking Action: July 2016 – November 2016

Once the action research team completed the analysis of teacher responses, we decided on a two-prong approach to intervention. The first would be a one-day retreat that covered general topics that surfaced in the focus group sessions, and the second would be four more intensive sessions that were aimed at increasing comfort with courageous conversations.

Ten teachers signed up and attended the initial retreat sessions, which were led by four Faith Central University professors in the areas of adult learning, supervision of instruction, and understanding the roles of mentors. Each session addressed issues that were themes from the focus group sessions as well as in current mentoring literature. The presenters utilized a presentation format that shared new information while also incorporating mentor teacher experiences and knowledge about the subject area. Each rotation allowed for interactive conversation and collaborative sharing of experiences.

Beginning in August, nine teachers participated in monthly courageous conversations meetings that had a format similar to "group therapy." The facilitator opened with a prompt relating to the challenges of addressing uncomfortable topics with pre-service candidates. Each teacher shared past experiences and strategies used to broach difficult conversations. After the second session, teachers completed a brief digital feedback form on the effectiveness of the community of practice model towards reaching the desired goals of the intervention. The feedback received provided additional data for the action research planning team to assess the effectiveness of our plan.

Evaluating Action: November 2016 – February 2017

The evaluation phase of action research, according to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), is when

> the outcomes of the action, both intended and unintended, are examined with a view to seeing: if the original constructing fitted, if the actions taken matched the constructing, if the action was taken in an appropriate manner and what feeds into the next cycle of constructing, planning, and action. (p. 9)

In following with this definition, the action research planning team used the research purpose and questions as a framework for determining whether the goals of the project and intervention had been met. Team members met several times during the planning phase to analyze the transcripts of the focus groups and to plan targeted interventions. Upon completion of the entire action research cycle, the planning team analyzed focus group notes, professional learning, courageous conversations field notes and transcripts, journal entries, and individual interview transcripts. The team used this data to assess mentor teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the professional learning provided.

Based on the theoretical framework established at the beginning of this study, the action research team used the data gathered to draw a correlation between mentor teachers' responses and changes in their efficacy for and commitment to mentoring. During this stage of the action research, the effectiveness of the intervention was substantiated based on teacher feedback. Specifically, teachers reported overwhelming satisfaction with the community of practice model as a structure for increasing their efficacy for mentoring. In addition, the analysis of data unearthed the need for a blended model of professional learning that provided specific skills training on areas identified as

barriers prior to teachers engaging in communities of practice. Finally, the evaluation stage shed light on areas where the action research team can continue the cycle of research as a means of strengthening the placement experience for mentors and mentees at Fredrick Brown Elementary.

Merging of the Action Research Planning Team and Intervention Team

When initial plans were made for the action research project at Fredrick Brown Elementary, the researcher anticipated one action research team. This team was to include school and university leaders who were charged with problem construction and intervention planning. However, after meeting with the teacher team in focus groups, it became apparent that they were also an action research team. In order to distinguish between the two groups, one was identified as the action research planning team and the other as the action research intervention team.

Once the initial research and problem of practice were solidified by the research team, the two groups worked collaboratively to refine the professional learning needs of teachers and to serve as co-facilitators of the community of practice sessions. It became apparent that the input of mentor teachers was critical to the planning and implementation of the chosen intervention. The teacher team also identified an additional intervention that they would like to initiate in a following action research cycle. This intervention would focus on providing more training on school procedures for pre-service candidates.

Action Research Outcomes

Action research was a highly effective tool for addressing the issue of mentor teacher efficacy and commitment at Fredrick Brown Elementary. The action research process allowed those closest to the problem of practice, mentors themselves, to be

directly involved in constructing the problem, planning the action intervention, and evaluating the success of that action. By including the mentors in each cycle, the action research planning team was able to ensure that each step was reflective of the voices and experiences of those most impacted. As a result of this inclusive process, the action research outcome was the development of a professional learning seminar that addressed the principles of adult learning, instructional supervision, and the roles and responsibilities of mentors. In addition, monthly courageous conversations were held as a forum for addressing the most articulated barrier to mentoring. Mentor teacher individual interviews and journal entries provided detailed feedback that validated the success of the intervention and the value of the action research process.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The objective of this action research case study was to increase mentor commitment and efficacy by reducing the costs and increasing the benefits associated with the role. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?
2. What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?
3. In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teacher efficacy as mentors?

In this chapter, findings from the action research case study are presented for each question. Findings are based on data generated from focus group meetings, action research team meetings, session transcripts, field notes, and interviews with participants. Table 4 summarizes the findings for each research question.

Table 4

Research Findings

Research Question	Findings
1. What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?	a. Mentoring instills a sense of professional accountability to exemplary practice. b. Mentoring encourages self and partner reflection during the daily course of practice. c. Mentoring allows one to give back to the profession by supporting teacher education.
2. What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?	a. Teaching adult learners and coaching competence can be challenging for mentors. b. Differing expectations of student behaviors can create a sense of conflict between mentors and pre-service candidates. c. Mentor confidence with having critical conversations can significantly hinder mentoring relationships.
3. In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teacher efficacy as mentors?	a. Communities of practice allowed for the collective sharing of needs, resources, and experiences. b. Communities of practice prompted self reflection regarding mentoring practices and interactions with pre-service candidates. c. Having a foundational knowledge of how to support adult learners in their roles as pre-service candidates built the effectiveness of the community of practice. d. Knowledge gained in a community of practice is beneficial, but mentors are uncertain regarding sustainability of learning.

Research Question 1: Perceived Benefits for Veteran Teachers Who Mentor Pre-service Teachers

Although the aim of this research study was to increase mentor teacher efficacy by understanding and supporting the challenges faced in that role, the action research planning team felt that it was equally important to understand the components of mentoring that were deemed as positive. The team recognized that it is generally easier to focus on the negatives of assigned tasks and did not want the intervention team to lose sight of the benefits of serving as mentors. Ironically, the findings identified from this question aided both teams in recognizing how mentoring profits teachers personally and contributes to their professional growth. The three themes found in focus group and individual transcripts and field notes are below:

a. Mentoring instills a sense of professional accountability for exemplary practice by mentors.
b. Mentoring encourages self and partner reflection during the daily course of practice.
c. Mentoring allows one to give back to the profession by supporting teacher education.

Mentoring Instills a Sense of Professional Accountability

The action research intervention team was divided into two focus groups in order to solicit feedback on benefits and barriers to mentoring. The action research planning team met multiple times in order to analyze the responses of teacher participants and to plan appropriate interventions. Data gathered from the focus groups, seminar minutes, and interview transcripts were analyzed and supported the finding that mentoring significantly impacts the professionalism exhibited by mentor teachers.

According to mentor teachers, the role of mentor places them in a position of constant observation. Although they, as mentors, are charged with supervising the professional development of pre-service candidates, the presence of an additional individual in their classroom creates a climate where they also feel an obligation to consistently model best practices. As participants reflected about this benefit of mentoring, it was evident that the perceived obligation to serve as a positive role model was not only self-imposed, but welcomed. Several mentors spoke with passion as they discussed how mentoring stimulated them to always be mindful about their practices and to be exemplary in their work. Mentor Tammie Nicholson touted the value of mentoring by saying that the role *"keeps instruction fresh. It's really easy to get stale with our*

work. Working in a PDS really makes me excited." As she shared these feelings, there were affirming nods and words of agreement from every member of the focus group. Ashley Carson, mentor, also spoke about how the expectations of mentoring within a PDS school prompt teachers to challenge themselves to be their best:

> *Having someone with you all the time makes you a better teacher. You are their model. You are being observed by them all the time, so it naturally makes you a better teacher. This work happens every day. Not like being observed. Having a student teacher and a Block allows you to push yourself.*

Mentors spoke within the focus groups and in individual interviews regarding how they constantly push themselves to improve because they want to ensure that they represent high standards of instruction. The idea of being observed at all times could be intimidating and daunting for some educators, but Fredrick Brown teachers were very clear about how they benefitted professionally from having Block 3 and Block 4 students in their classrooms. The value of mentoring was reiterated by Angela Harris:

> *The model pushes us to be what we say that we are in our classes and with our students. Benefits are very rich for them and for us. I like having another person to consistently see everything. This is what it is really like. It's not always bright and shiny. It takes work to get there.*

Harris was clear in her remarks that the idea of always being on stage does not suggest that each moment is an award-winning performance. To the contrary, her comment that "*it's not always bright and shiny*" is a candid acknowledgement of the realities that teachers face when implementing lessons with students. In addition, her open discussion suggested that pre-service candidates need to see the good and the bad:

It is what I do in those not-so-good moments that makes me grow, and I may not be as focused on those moments if I did not have a pre-service candidate waiting to see how I am going to respond.

Megan Graham had similar statements regarding how mentoring improves her performance as a teacher:

I am a better teacher because I mentor. Mentoring makes me think about what I do every day, about my practice. I am better because I try to be the best model possible for my student teacher. You have to model what you preach. You cannot fake it.

Graham and Harris had similar reflections regarding their in-the-moment thinking of next instructional steps being more thoughtful because of the presence of their pre-service candidates. It was evident from their responses that they refrain from haphazard decisions and being ill-prepared because the perception of others is important to them. More specifically, they take serious their role as mentor and want to ensure that they teach by modeling more than by *"telling others how it should be done"* (Graham).

Mentoring Provides a Partner With Whom to Engage in Professional Reflections

A second theme of mentoring benefits that emerged from the multiple data sources collected related to how reflective mentors and mentees are. It is this reflection that frequently serves as the foundation for improved practice by both mentors and pre-service candidates. This finding was ironic in that the fourth of nine essentials for being a Professional Development School is "a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants" (NAPDS, 2007). The significance of this finding for Fredrick Brown is that the development of a reflective body of educators has occurred

organically as teachers have embraced the responsibility that comes with the role of mentor.

Carmen Smith, a relatively new mentor, expressed that *"having a teacher candidate gives you an extra set of eyes in your classroom. You are able to reflect on different perspectives about your students as well as about your teaching."* Smith's newness as a mentor allowed her to also recall how she learned to engage in reflective practice by modeling from her mentor:

> *My mentor would have regular conversations with me about her instructional decisions, whether they worked, and what she or we could do differently to make it better the next time. Watching her do this showed me the importance of being thoughtful about all areas of my work.*

Angela Harris, a veteran mentor and curriculum leader with the school and district, was very passionate about the importance of reflective practice. During the focus group discussion, individual interview, and journal entries, Harris spoke repeatedly about how critical it is to constantly think about instructional decisions and to share those thoughts with pre-service candidates:

> *The supervision work makes you reflective. You have to ask yourself, "Now why did I do that?" and you have to be able to explain it to your Block, and it makes you really think about your work. We tell them that we are not just doing things out the air. So, then we have to reflect and put words to why do we make the decisions that we make. We are teacher educators. I think I have been a lot more purposeful in the things that I've decided to do. And I think a lot, I'm thinking aloud more, talking through more because she's there, she's listening. She's*

like—she's even asking those same questions, like, "So, how would that work?" But she's doing it to clarify for her to understand, which is helping me to reflect and understand why that makes sense. So it's kind of like if we could come up with like a—that mentor conversation, let's pick through a lesson plan together, let's look at a block of time together and understand the components or the reasons why we do these things. Then they're able to understand the planning portion."

June Sanders, who is naturally reflective about her practices, reiterated the importance of teaching pre-service candidates the value of being reflective. Like Harris, she sees reflection as a valuable tool for analyzing one's own instruction and planning for next steps to best meet the needs of her students. Sanders does not assume that the practice of reflection comes naturally for all educators. Thus, she intentionally teaches the process to her pre-service candidates as she does other instructional strategies:

I may not be able to teach you how to respond to every situation that you may face, but what I can teach you is reflection, being reflective, being flexible, and seeing where things work, and when I have to change it. And I really do feel like this year my mentee was able to tell me that. I feel like she gained that it's not about if it fits within this box; it's making things work from the situation that you're in.

Megan Graham has worked as a mentor since the school opened in 2009. As a result, she has worked with a variety of pre-service candidates, Faith Central University professors, and two professors in residence. Her extensive experience and overall commitment to student success made her one of the most thoughtful action research

participants. Throughout the process, Megan could be observed processing new information and reflecting on her own practices. She was also very open and honest in her sharing and sought to make meaning out of the PDS initiative and action research goals. When talking about benefits of mentoring, Megan stated,

> *It's really nice to have a fresh perspective. You always have another person to give you feedback. When I have an awful lesson, I can ask, "What do you think I could have done differently?" It's reflective. "Why do you think that failed so awfully?"*

Having seen the benefits of engaging in personal reflection and peer reflection, Megan strives to engage in such practices daily. Even though she understands the need for reflection, she stressed the value of having such work facilitated between mentors and pre-service candidates. According to Megan, the Fredrick Brown PDS had a stronger focus on inquiry and reflection when the partnership first began. During the interview, she shared her recollection of common practices and of the professor in residence's role:

> *I feel like for the first several years that I had student teachers through UGA, we were really reflective. And I don't know what was different. It might have been Dr. Amos. He was really into that whole kind of emotional reflection: "Let's talk about what was good. Let's talk about what we can work on." And there was a lot of dialogue back and forth—and it wasn't always spoken—but we would write a lot and reflect a lot, like written reflection. And we still do it, but there's something about it, it's not as effective.*

It was evident from speaking with Ms. Graham that she desires a stronger and more structured format to encourage reflective dialogue among mentors and mentees. Based on

her feedback and the responses of others, reflection results in more effective instruction based on openness about what is being accomplished within classrooms minute by minute.

A related sharing from participants was how they, as mentors, learned from pre-service candidates when they engaged in reflective conversations with each. One might assume that the growth would only be for pre-service candidates. However, teachers reported significant contributions and insights from mentees when they shared in professional dialogue with each other and discussed each person's perspective on the instruction that had occurred. Tammie Nicholson, a second-year mentor, stated, *"Although I am a recent graduate, I have found that there are many opportunities to learn from the student teachers. We can share different ideas and strategies with each other."* It could be a natural assumption that Nicholson stands to learn more from pre-service candidates because of her newness to the teaching profession. However, Carolyn Brown, a twelve-year veteran who has mentored for the past six years, shared similar comments regarding the value of mentors and mentees reflecting together. During the interview session, Carolyn said, *"I really like the opportunity to learn from others. Student teachers bring in different skills and ideas, and we are able to share our knowledge with each other."* The presence of similar feedback from teachers at different points of their careers confirmed the mutual benefits that exist between mentors and pre-service candidates in the area of reflective sharing.

Teachers shared another perspective on the benefit of reflection within a professional development school that is not available to pre-service candidates who complete their placements in more traditional settings. According to participants, the

community that exists between pre-service candidates serves as an additional forum for them to participate in reflective conversations within the work environment. All of the mentor teacher participants completed their student teaching in traditional settings and noted the support system that exists for pre-service candidates in professional development schools due to there being multiple student teachers placed in one setting. According to June Sanders, Fredrick Brown pre-service candidates not only can share in reflective, professional dialogue with their mentors, but with their peers:

> *It's good for the student teachers to be able to work together and communicate. It gives them connections, like they are their own community of learners. I was the only student teacher, and it's nice for them to have someone to talk about the work with."*

June's beliefs were reaffirmed as Leslie Wilson talked about her personal experiences during student teaching and what she has observed among the pre-service candidates at Fredrick Brown. During the focus group session, Leslie presented the following opinion:

> *As the only student teacher when I had my placement, I think it is really nice to have a big group all working on the same thing, doing the same thing, who can meet and communicate. They have their own little team, like our grade-level team. They are able to work together and help each other think and reflect about their work.*

As the intervention team met over the course of the six months, several conversations surfaced regarding the value of reflection in professional practice. According to teachers, it is reflection that serves as a sounding board to assess

instructional strategies and to brainstorm best practices in meeting the needs of students. Additionally, it was evident that teachers see this opportunity for partner thought and talk to extend beyond the mentor-mentee relationship to the community of pre-service candidates within the school setting.

Mentoring Allows One to Give Back to the Profession

The third theme that emerged aligns closely with the first finding presented. Mentors talked extensively about the opportunity to contribute to teacher education by serving as mentors. More specifically, teachers referenced the importance of giving back to the profession in the same manner that someone once gave to them. This overarching belief in giving back closely resembled the premise of feeling responsible for modeling exemplary practice. As mentors talked during the focus groups, they were very passionate about their role in ensuring that quality teachers enter the field of education. Sandra Jackson talked with great conviction as she shared her self-imposed obligation to train teachers who leave her classroom to be prepared to provide high levels of instruction to students daily. For her, the charge is personal, as she views each child as her own. Sandra shared her feelings by saying,

> *If you let somebody do something or teach a child that you wouldn't want to happen to a child of your own, if you see them delivering a lesson that's not effective and you say, "Oh, that's okay," but you, if you wouldn't want your child sitting in that classroom… We are preparing them to be teachers in a profession that we're already being targeted, in a profession that people don't respect, so why send them out there to be something less than an exemplar for what you want?*

As Sandra spoke, the room became filled with others agreeing with her position as gatekeeper for the profession. Megan, Carolyn, and Angela all immediately began injecting comments regarding the importance of quality assurance. Megan said, *"We owe it to our kids."* Carolyn followed with, "*If we don't have expectations now, we have failed our students and the university students."* Angela screamed, *"Amen! We have to send them out prepared and good!"* Ashley Carson was equally emphatic as she began to speak about the role of veteran educators in countering all of the negative perceptions that currently exist in regard to the field of education:

> *We value our profession and take it seriously. We invest in these kids. Media bombards us about bad teachers, cheating, inappropriate relationships. People don't see the good. Mentoring allows us to make investments in best practices that student teachers take with them and use to become better.*

The comments and reflections shared by mentors in the area of giving back to the field of teacher education held strong similarities to the thoughts about mentoring that caused them to be more professionally accountable. It appears that the strong levels of professionalism that guided their commitment to modeling exemplary practices for pre-service candidates also served as the basis for their expectation of only sending well-prepared novice teachers into the field. Megan Graham reiterated the belief of the group:

> *If you want good teachers coming out into the field, we have a responsibility to mentor them. We have to remember that someone took the time to help us develop. Some days are crazy and I just want to be alone. But in the end, I want to give back. I want to be a part in developing new teachers.*

Conversations in focus groups and courageous conversations meetings frequently would turn to the importance of mentor teachers being open and reflective with pre-service candidates regarding how they can improve. Most mentors felt that the purpose of supervising mentees was to support university-level teacher educators by serving as a training ground for real world opportunities for practice and growth. According to Tammie Nicholson, "*Student teachers are there to learn from us. So I think that I don't feel as weird having those tough conversations with them because at the end of the day, that's why they're here, is to have conversations."*

By understanding the importance of "teaching" pre-service candidates, teachers seem to create a job description for themselves as mentors. The concept of paying it forward guides the work of Fredrick Brown mentors as they create a learning environment based on high expectations for professional performance. To the teachers who participated in the study, mentoring is more than simply serving as a host site for those who need clinical hours. Instead, it involves a personal commitment to sharing one's skills and experiences with someone else in hopes of strengthening the field of education. Carolyn Brown reflected on one of the presenters who compared the role of mentor teachers as being as critical as that of physicians preparing medical students:

> *I think hearing presenters compare us to the doctors that are practicing, I think that that really made me realize, okay, maybe I'm not overthinking this because I think that if we don't train the teachers well, we will continue to have shortages of qualified teachers. And teachers will continue to leave their profession because it's hard work that we do. And I think that as much as the university wants to*

prepare them, really having that from someone who is in the trenches is so important.

Although Fredrick Brown mentor teachers who participated in this action research project had varying levels of professional experiences, they shared a common commitment to working with pre-service candidates. When the action research planning team began exploring the problem of practice associated with the needs of mentors within a PDS, there was an assumption that teachers mentored because it was a requirement of the school. While it is an expectation for all veteran teachers to mentor, the data generated from focus groups, meeting recordings, and interviews showed that teachers want to mentor. They recognize the value of having strong mentors for those in teacher education programs, and they want to ensure that the future of the profession is in competent hands. In essence, Fredrick Brown teachers see themselves as essential adjunct members of the Faith Central teacher education faculty by being providers of strong field experiences.

Research Question 2: Perceived Barriers for Veteran Teachers Who Mentor Pre-service Candidates

In order to effectively understand mentor teacher commitment and efficacy, it was critical that the action research team gain an understanding of what mentors perceived to be barriers to their work. This knowledge would lay the foundation for the research team to plan meaningful professional learning aimed at increasing mentor teacher efficacy for their role. Bandura and Tschannen- Moran and Hoy's work were the basis for developing interventions to strengthen mentor teacher mastery and vicarious experiences.

During the initial focus group meetings, teachers were very vocal regarding their perception of barriers to mentoring. Although the questioning began with prompts to solicit thoughts on benefits, the conversations quickly turned to what needed to be changed with the placement experience. Similarly, mentor teachers spoke extensively regarding what needed to be done differently by Faith Central faculty. After analyzing transcripts from the focus groups, courageous conversations sessions, and interviews, three common themes surfaced that reflected the feelings and beliefs of intervention participants. These findings were used as the basis for planning professional learning to support mentor teachers in their role:

a. Teaching adult learners and coaching competence can be challenging for mentors.
b. Differing expectations of student behaviors can create a sense of conflict between mentors and pre-service candidates.
c. Mentor confidence with having critical conversations can significantly hinder mentoring relationships.

Teaching Adult Learners and Coaching Competence Can Be Challenging for Mentors.

When mentors talked about the joys and benefits of mentoring, they spoke extensively about wanting to be a model of exemplary practice for pre-service candidates and the importance of giving back to the profession. Ironically, one of the most commonly articulated barriers related to extending their role as models to being teacher educators. More specifically, the barrier that was commonly mentioned was tied to the challenge of teaching those who lack the natural ability of teaching. As mentors talked with presenters in the summer session, it became evident that they lacked knowledge and

training in the principles of adult learning. In addition, most mentors struggled with balancing the expectations that they held of pre-service candidates while also being mindful of their position as students. Carolyn Brown captured the feelings of many of her colleagues:

> *There is an ability that some people have and some people don't. It's really frustrating when you realize that there are some people who have gone to school and it still is not there. You don't want to burst their bubble, but at the same time you don't want your kids to struggle. It's a hard place. You see how young they are, and you don't want to crush their dreams.*

Ashley Carson and many other teachers nodded in agreement as Carolyn shared her thoughts. It was apparent that most mentors had been assigned pre-service candidates with a range of skills and sometimes found themselves in the position of having to coach someone who, as Ashley Carson said, *"may not be cut out for teaching."* Ashley continued in sharing her experiences by saying,

> *My first student teacher would say what I wanted and had the same expectations, but what do you do when they don't pick on it naturally? You don't want to be difficult. It's difficult when they don't have that natural ability. I feel like that can be a problem. I don't know. The problem is that you cannot teach that. You almost can't coach it. Some people just naturally have this teaching way about them. Some of them are just really strong. Sometimes you can give feedback to help with that, and sometimes it does not matter. So what do you do when you have one of those?*

During the focus group sessions and summer professional learning, teachers shared stories of pre-service candidates who experienced significant growth, and also of times that all of their efforts seemed in vain. The mentor teachers were very passionate as they shared what some might call war stories of past candidates who were not coachable. More importantly, they talked frankly regarding their feelings of inadequacy as it related to knowing how to support those who do not respond to their supervision attempts. Veteran teacher Carolyn Brown has generally had positive results with the students who were placed in her classroom. However, she also expressed uncertainty in how to proceed when candidates do not grasp the role of educator. During the focus group meeting, Carolyn posed this question to the group:

> *What do you do when your student teacher is just a rock? It doesn't happen often, but we have had it happen in our grade level a couple of times and it's a struggle. You just feel it. You feel like it's another student that you are responsible for. You turn around and they are duds. Or they are just sitting there doing their class assignments and you want to throw their computers across the room. It's especially hard when your Block 3 outshines your Block 4 with natural ability. That can be tricky.*

Angela Harris shared very similar sentiments as Carolyn when she talked about some of her past experiences with pre-service candidates who not only lacked ability, but also lacked motivation. Angela's comments garnered many nonverbal affirmations from other group mentors as she talked about those candidates who do not appear to take the placement seriously. She posed a question very similar to Carolyn's when she asked, *"What do you do when your person is just a rock? They are coming from a world of*

college—where you either pass or fail. They have not learned how to work in the world as an adult." It was apparent that it is during these times that mentor teachers feel that the role is more burdensome than beneficial. While all participants seemed to embrace the opportunity to serve as a teacher educator, most had felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of working with pre-service candidates who were not of some additional value to their classroom. Carmen Smith described her frustrations with a candidate who lacked competence:

> *It was like she was becoming more like one of my troubling students. She was just somebody else that I had to worry about in the classroom. And I tried so hard, and I just didn't know—I just felt like I was kind of like out of my league a little bit. And she wanted it so badly. She kept coming every day, and I mean, it was hard for her. She came back every day and she did all of the things that she was supposed to do every day, but she never could get it."*

Tammie Nicholson agreed with Carmen when she stated**,** *"We are teaching student teachers. Sometimes we can forget that. It can be hard to juggle everything that you have to do in your classroom and also teach another adult."*

Related to the concept of working with pre-service candidates who lack natural ability was the idea of mentors understanding how to teach and motivate adults in contrast to teaching K-5 students daily. Teachers recognized that the skill set required to impart knowledge among nine-year-old children is vastly different than that needed to teach young adults. Megan Graham captured the overall feelings of most focus group members when she stated,

We need a class for how to teach adults. Ultimately, we are teaching adults. We are all used to teaching kids, but this is different. Some mentors have forgotten what it's like to be in the student teacher's shoes. We have to take ourselves back there."

Sandra Jackson, a mentor who has not faced many of the challenges expressed by her colleagues, did concur with the need to have a different skill set when working with adult learners. Based on her experiences, Sandra acknowledged that promoting effort among pre-service candidates can be more challenging. According to Sandra, *"Motivation, now that's something. Motivating a student teacher and novice adult is way different from motivating, let's say, one of the fourth graders."* June Sanders agreed, adding, ***"****It's really easy to tell a child when they are doing wrong, but when you talk to an adult the same way, it can be condescending."* This finding contributed significantly to the development of the summer professional learning course, as all but one participant requested training on the principles of adult learning.

Closely aligned to this finding of the challenges of teaching adults is what mentors perceive to be an attitude of entitlement held by pre-service candidates. As mentors talked extensively about the barriers to mentoring, there was a common thread of discussion regarding how the attitudes of pre-service candidates can inhibit their willingness to learn from mentors. While it can be difficult to teach those who lack natural ability, mentors felt that this challenge is intensified by pre-service candidates' elevated sense of ability. Carolyn Brown summarized the feelings of mentors when she said, *"It's usually their mentality, when they come in with the idea of I'm going to do as little as possible, you see that. Sometimes you have them come in with, 'I have arrived.*

I'm God's gift to education.'" Leslie Wilson strongly agreed with Carolyn, stating, *"Many of them have a millennial mindset. They act as though they are so entitled. They are owed something or naturally already know the answers."* Sandra Jackson, who, as mentioned earlier, is a more efficacious mentor, acknowledged that she has seen similar attitudes with some of her mentors. As she reflected, she presented a mischievous smile as she shared how she generally responds to pre-service candidates who act as if they already have all of the answers:

> *When Angela and I were talking about, or she was talking about with the whole group, how the student teachers come in and they think they've arrived and they're doing all this stuff, and then it doesn't work. And I explained, well, sometimes I step out and let them have class to see what happens. And when it falls apart, they realize, "Okay, something is not goin". That seems to be the best way to let them see how little they really know.*

The challenge of teaching those who lack natural skills and those who do not recognize their status as a novice was dominant in the action research findings. As the action research planning team, we were challenged with identifying presenters who could support mentors in the development of skills needed to teach adults. Teachers are eager to contribute to the professional development of future educators, but they need training on how to effectively coach instruction and how to address the needs of adult learners.

Differing Expectations of Student Behaviors Can Create a Sense of Conflict

As the action research team reviewed teacher feedback from the focus group sessions, it was apparent that one of the most articulated barriers to mentoring related to how the dynamics of the K-5 classroom changed with the addition of another adult into

that learning space. Although there were some conversations surrounding the shifts in instructional practices when mentees are present, teachers were most troubled by the behavioral implications when pre-service candidates do not have the same expectations of students as their mentor teachers have. According to mentors, behavior routines, procedures, and expectations are critical for the learning environment to flourish. If there is a conflict among mentors' and pre-service candidates' beliefs in these areas, tension is bound to occur.

Carmen Smith had had a challenging year with student behaviors in her classroom. She attributes many of her problems to the lack of structure provided by her pre-service candidate and the inconsistent expectations that existed for her classroom:

> *Behavior management can be tricky when there are differing styles between the mentor and the student teacher. You try to support them while they are learning, but it is hard to not have control of your class. This year was challenging because my students did not respond to my student teacher at all, and I feel like I lost control of my class. Behavior management is definitely more challenging when you have a student teacher.*

As Angela Harris spoke about the challenges of pre-service candidates having different expectations for discipline, she caused the room to fill with laughter. While her vivid description of how pre-service candidates tend to interact with students was humorous, it also was an accurate depiction of why discipline can be a point of contention during the placement experience. Angela pointedly summarized the problem:

> *When your student teacher does not have the same expectations that you do, how do you have them adapt that? Those expectations are ground level for how*

classrooms work in general. Undermining it throws me off; it throws off the system. Many of our student teachers are told to go in and try to become their friends and try to win them over. They lose it from the very beginning. They come in with that buddy, buddy, buddy way. Does that make sense? This is just my experience. So when they get up there, they don't respect them as their teacher. And that's when they are like, "I don't understand. I came in and established a buddy relationship." Yeah, but you didn't establish teacher.

Leslie Wilson had very similar thoughts as Angela in terms of how important it is for the pre-service candidates to establish themselves as additional adults in the classroom. As pre-service candidates transition from the role of student to teacher, it is imperative that they understand the need to exert some level of authority within the classroom setting. Leslie reiterated the thoughts of other mentors:

If you do not have good management, you are not going to have a successful lesson. You have to establish with your classroom that this person is the teacher. You know, I mean, the first time they get up there, they [the students] are going to see how much they can get away with. How far can we push you? So when we talk about natural ability….maybe behavior management just comes natural for some of them. A lot of them are like, "What do I do?" All of a sudden you are in front of 25 kids, and what do I do?

Sandra Jackson reflected on the challenges that she has faced with the placement of pre-service candidates. Considered a strong instructional leader and disciplinarian among her colleagues, Sandra consistently maintains a classroom with high academic and behavioral expectations. Consequently, she is very mindful of how pre-service

candidates begin to assume the role of teacher. While sharing with the intervention team, Sandra remembered one of her most challenging mentees:

> *She thought if she just did what I did, then the class would behave in the same accord. And I was like, you have to make the class yours. If you see stuff happening, you have to address it because the kids know you see it. And if you're not saying anything, then they're looking at you as you're just another person in the room. Because they know if I see something, I'm going to address it immediately. The kids recognize the difference when the ownership is not there. And even though you can mentor and you can give advice, but if the ownership is not there, I think they miss part of that component. So having that conversation about this is what happens and it's a direct result of your involvement or how much you're involved or not involved in the classroom.*

As the action research intervention team continued in discussions about pre-service candidates and classroom management, it became apparent that there was a missing link within Faith Central University's curriculum. Teachers spoke candidly concerning how the university prepared students for the planning and instructional expectations of being a teacher, but failed to provide any instruction in the area of discipline. The two university faculty members who were members of the action research team concurred. It seems that Faith Central's middle grades program includes a course in discipline, but the elementary program does not. Tammie Nicholson, one of the most recent Faith Central University mentors at Fredrick Brown, confirmed the unavailability of coursework in the area of classroom management: ***"****I was in undergrad two or three years ago and there was nothing on discipline. No classroom management,*

nothing." Megan Graham's reflection on her observation of pre-service candidates' interactions with students also pointed to a disconnect within Faith Central's teachings and the needs of new teachers when they enter the classroom. Megan stated,

> *From my experience, there seems to be a lack of cohesion between classroom management in the real world and classroom management at Faith Central. It's great, it's beautiful, it's idealistic, coming from people who have not been in the classroom.*
>
> *I think there needs to be some consistency because they come to us and they are told things like be their friends, be their companions. Don't get me wrong, I go through those doors everyday expecting to be a confidante to my students, for them to love me, respect me. But it's like your mom. Your mom can't be your best friend when you are a child.*

The sentiments shared by Megan were echoed by Carolyn Brown. Carolyn's teacher education program had a strong focus on classroom management, and teacher candidates were given on-site instruction for developing their own method of discipline. According to Carolyn, pre-service candidates recognize the need to have control over the classroom, but lack the necessary skills to do so:

> *I've never encountered a student teacher that wasn't eager to learn that. It is something that is of interest. It is high interest. It is something they are willing to work on. They recognize it. If you are in it for the right reasons, you recognize the benefit of discipline. One of the things that I see missing from their coursework is classroom management. I did not go to Faith Central University. I went to [university omitted]. We had an entire course, a professor our*

sophomore year, and we stayed with her the entire time through our blocks. The only thing she was to teach us was classroom management. So she taught us what we should do in different situations. We would role play and she would come and observe us. Not for our lessons, but for our classroom management. She gave us immediate feedback. I was able to learn specific strategies that worked for me. I think that the biggest hindrance a lot of times for student teachers, there's two things that they struggle with, classroom management and how to make it their own, and the confidence when they're presenting lessons.

The prevalence of responses from participants in the area of discipline not only highlighted how the lack of consistent discipline expectations can be a barrier to mentoring, but also shed light on gaps within the program design at Faith Central. Although mentors expressed significant frustrations in the area of discipline, their conversations were also proactive. Action research intervention team members offered to work with Faith Central faculty to identify specific areas of need in order to design a classroom management seminar for all pre-service candidates.

Mentor Confidence With Critical Conversations Can Hinder Relationships

One of the most prominent themes that was generated from mentor teacher feedback during focus group meetings and individual interviews related to the difficulty that mentors had with engaging in courageous conversations. Mentors talked extensively about their reluctance to approach topics that related to personal and instructional issues for fear of pre-service teachers' reactions. This fear does not seem to be due to any intimidation that is presented by mentees, but instead a result of mentors not wanting to appear insensitive or callous. The prevalence of discussions around this topic signaled the

need for more extensive focus on this area and became the target for the action research team planning a meaningful intervention for mentors. Mentors clearly understood that it was their role to provide constructive feedback to aid in the professional growth of pre-service candidates. However, they struggled with how to do so in a way that was not offensive or overwhelming. Carmen Smith summarized the general sentiments of the group:

` *We have to give feedback. They need to know how to improve, but you can't do it in a way that's overwhelming. You can't just give her a list of twenty things to go work on. It's important to find the right way to give constructive criticism.*

She continued by openly sharing how difficult and stressful it can be for her to address issues when they arise with her mentee:

Some days I have to have difficult conversations and I want to ask somebody if they can come do this for me. Because I lose sleep at night when I know what I have to talk about the next day. It puts a pit in my stomach. I don't care how true it is. It still hurts. I don't like to hurt people's feelings. I don't like confrontation.

Tammie Nicholson concurred with the thoughts shared by Carmen and also clarified where most of the difficulties lie for her. According to Tammie, *"It's easy to talk about the instructional stuff because that's why they are there. But it's harder to discuss the personal things like dress. And we still have to spend a lot of time on it."* Tammie's comments garnered much support from other mentors as they all began to talk about how they agreed with her. It was evident that most mentors were very at ease with regard to supervision-related topics, but were more reluctant when they had to address

topics such as dress code, interpersonal skills, and other more personal topics. June Sanders supported Tammie's comments when she stated, *"Having uncomfortable conversations is always hard for me. It's something about talking about the personal things. We need a class for how to be direct."* Leslie Wilson concurred with the feelings of the majority and expanded on what had been shared by discussing how prolonging difficult conversations can lead to more problems or can result in the pre-service candidate assuming that their actions are acceptable. Leslie recounted one of her passed challenges:

> *That's when it starts to get uncomfortable. You are in those awkward positions, and you think it is just one thing, and they all begin to add up. I had one that wore short skirts and I was like, "Oh." And the first time, I didn't say anything. And I'm like—but we had talked about shorts, like her first day, like just in general. And she had something and I was like, "That might be a little short." But it came up in a normal conversation. It was like, "Yeah, you probably don't want to wear that." So then I just kind of thought, "That's not going to happen again." She wore something else short another time and I thought, and I didn't say anything because in my head I'm thinking, she won't do it again, though. Well, then she did it again, and I'm thinking, "Well, now I can't say anything because I didn't say anything the other time."*

Megan Graham added an additional lens to the discussion about having courageous conversations as she questioned the role that gender plays in teachers' discomfort: *"I think somehow, and I don't know what it is about our profession, maybe because it's mostly women, that then, like, you just, you feel like you aren't supposed to*

have those conversations." During the individual interviews, Carmen Smith shared very similar thoughts as Megan. She talked extensively about how much she had reflected on the time that was spent among the group discussing their challenges with critical conversations. Carmen offered thought provoking insight when she stated,

> *So in the midst of all of these conversations that we were having and talking about emotions and making sure that we're not upsetting the other person, would people be having these conversations in other professions? That's what I kept thinking in the back of my head. Take, for example, the fire department. Bob will just tell them like it is. Or anywhere—IBM, the corporate world, the bank—would people really be having these conversations and these worries that we have that we do as teachers? Is it because we are who we are and teachers are caring? And then I did keep thinking, though, "Wow, would other companies be spending an hour a month or whatever, an hour every few weeks, having something called courageous conversations?" And then I thought, "Gosh, if I told other people that I'm in a courageous conversations group, are they just going to crack up laughing?" because, of course, other professions think that we just cut and paste all day, too.*

Angela Harris did not seem to be as apprehensive about the idea of having courageous conversations, but instead was more frustrated with pre-service candidates not fully grasping the gravity of issues when she presents them. Instead of seeking help with greater comfort, she was looking for feedback on how to present her concerns with more clarity. Angela expressed her thoughts by saying,

Sometimes you try to have the hard conversations, but they never get the point. It's like they think it's ok not to get it. In the real world, you would get called in to the principal and have a conversation. It's kind of like, what are the steps? What are the steps to hold them accountable for their actions?

Leslie Wilson, who is very pragmatic in her thinking, reflected on a workshop that was presented by the school's professor in residence. She reminded the group of an activity that was designed to help mentors and mentees identify their pet peeves and to share how to best communicate with each other. In her opinion, this workshop helped the team to avoid potential issues because they shared issues that could later become problems:

I like what Dr. Bob did for us at the beginning of the year. He gave us time to get to know each other before we started working with the kids. He gave us scenarios and it helped us to learn about each other. Things that bothered us. Things that it would be helpful to know, like I'm not a morning person. We also got to practice difficult situations and role play how we would respond. It helped us practice having awkward conversations.

The analysis of mentor responses highlighted the anxiety that can be caused as mentors anticipate conversations that may cause tension. Although they are the professionals, mentors are often reluctant to provide pre-service candidates with feedback due to concerns of how it will be received. The data suggested that mentors are more comfortable discussing issues of professional competence than areas of personal concern. As a result, many concerns are not addressed, and tensions mount due to mentor frustration. The action research planning team decided that the area of courageous

conversations was a priority for professional learning, as communication is critical to all areas of supervision.

Research Question 3: In What Ways, if any, Does the Community of Practice Model Support Teacher Efficacy for Mentoring?

The third research question focused on Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of communities of practice for professional learning. In their research on the principles of learning, the authors contend that learning is not an activity that one engages in during a designated time. Instead, learning is a social activity, and individuals learn inherently while within the community of practice engaging in their daily tasks. The action research planning team used feedback from the initial focus group sessions to identify a facilitator who could assist teachers in exploring their hesitancy with courageous conversations.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the majority of teacher participants expressed concerns related to adult learning and the lack of perceived motivation exhibited by pre-service candidates. In response to their articulated challenges, the action research planning team decided to provide a blended model of intervention that consisted of a traditional seminar format of professional learning prior to the beginning of the monthly communities of practice sessions. The seminar provided teachers with a foundational understanding of their role and responsibilities and a deeper understanding of the learning needs of pre-service candidates. Once these new insights were gained, teachers were better prepared to engage in productive dialogue during the communities of practice sessions. Data gathered from individual interview transcripts and mentor teacher journal entries led to the development of four themes aligned to the effectiveness of a

communities of practice model towards the development of teacher efficacy for mentoring:

a. Communities of practice allow for the collective sharing of needs, resources, and experiences.
b. The communities of practice model prompted self reflection regarding mentoring practices and interactions with pre-service candidates.
c. Having a foundational knowledge of how to support adult learners in their roles as pre-service candidates built the effectiveness of the community of practice.
d. Knowledge gained in the community of practice is beneficial, but mentors are uncertain regarding sustainability of knowledge.

Communities of Practice Allow for Collective Sharing

The action research team, which included the assigned to Fredrick Brown, worked diligently to find a facilitator who could support the courageous conversations needs expressed by teachers during the initial focus groups. As the team worked to analyze the barriers that were presented by intervention team members, it was evident that teachers had an abundance of skills among themselves and that they had the potential to be a tremendous level of support to each other. The role of the facilitator would be to guide team members in recognizing the repository of knowledge that they currently possess and to lead them in understanding the value of learning within their social context of work. During the four sessions, teachers openly shared their personal challenges with mentoring and offered insights to others based on their experiences. Carmen Smith talked during her interview about how beneficial it was to hear the stories of her colleagues:

They were just so good. It was kind of like therapy a little bit, which I think was the most beneficial. It was just like everyone has these problems. Everyone has these concerns. Like if you have a good one this time or you don't have a good student teacher this time, you've had concerns in the past. It can be kind of rough, and this just helped. I felt like, to hear other people's experiences and just know that I'm not in this by myself.

June Sanders echoed the sentiments shared by Carmen:

It helped to hear from other teachers how they are dealing with things. I liked hearing everyone else's perspectives and challenges they were facing with their own students. I liked to hear other teachers and what they're going through because you kind of get stuck in your cave, just out of necessity.

There was a recurring theme within the interviews with mentors as most discussed recognizing that their experiences are not in isolation. Instead, the challenges faced on one hall of the building are very similar to those of teachers on the opposite ends of the school. The frustrations experienced by primary grades teachers were similar to those of our upper grades teachers. Teachers seemed to be comforted and reaffirmed by knowing that they are not alone in their perceived struggles, and they openly received suggestions offered by their colleagues. Megan Graham was very thoughtful as she reflected on the value of the communities of practice model as a means of addressing mentor teacher concerns:

I loved that [community of practice model]. I thought that was really good because we talk amongst our teams. We talk amongst our hallway. But you never really know that the same issues that we're having in third grade or second grade

are the same things that a kindergarten teacher is experiencing or a fifth grade teacher. And so being able to share those with each other and hear how other people have handled it, I think really helped. Even if they didn't feel like they handled it the right way, it still was like, oh, well, but I actually think they did a pretty good job with that, or so here's what I'll try to do next time. I also think it just built community amongst teachers.

Several other teachers shared the same thoughts as they talked during the end of intervention interviews regarding the community of practice model. Mentor teachers were very appreciative of the opportunity to discuss their role as mentor within a safe and supportive space. The forum of a community of practice provided a venue for those with similar professional commitments to confer on how they navigate their responsibilities, while also learning from each other.

Carmen Smith succinctly described how the model supported mentor teachers by calling it *"organic teambuilding."* Different from traditional team-building events, where participants engage in staged activities to promote connections, the community of practice allowed teachers to connect with each other based on common, shared experiences and challenges. In addition, the feedback and suggestions they offered to each other strengthened their professional support system. Carmen continued in her thoughts about the benefits of the team concept by saying,

Honestly, it just helped me to get to know other teachers in the building better, even just to know that you have that support system with people that—I mean a lot of them I work with every day and others that I never see. But just to know that there is someone even on the other end of the building that I can approach and

talk to about this. Just knowing this is how she approaches it. It's totally different from the way I approach it, which I appreciate. And so, maybe she has a different insight into this, and I feel like just getting to know everyone better just made it feel better for me, too. I will never be able to handle things like some other teachers. But I can take nuggets of what Sandra says and then cater those to fit my style."

Tammie Nicholson's responses strongly aligned with those shared by Carmen:

I even liked hearing Carolyn Brown talking about her experiences. I don't talk to Carolyn Brown much at all, and really being able to have a, hear her experiences and how she's dealt with things in the past, things that are pretty simple, but that could blow up if it's not dealt with well. Especially just hearing different grade levels, too, and even some things I hadn't even thought about when they started talking about it, I was like, "Oh, I hadn't thought about that, but it's something to look for or think about."

Leslie Wilson concurred with the feedback given by other intervention team participants. Although Leslie has had limited issues with her role as mentor, she acknowledged that it was helpful to hear other perspectives so that she can improve on her practices as mentor:

I really liked hearing everybody's input on concerns and things like that because there were some things that I hadn't thought about or I think it was good to hear all the ideas and suggestions because I think when you put all the heads together, you come up with good ways to help improve it. I liked hearing how they were used. It also made me feel like I've had some really good ones.

It was evident from the volume of responses that mentor teachers appreciated the opportunity to have regular conversations about their roles with others who had similar experiences. Having a space that was designated for professional conversation and sharing provided teachers with a team of individuals to support them in their work. In addition, teachers were able to identify new resources within their building by connecting with those who they randomly have an opportunity to talk with extensively. By talking openly about needs and sharing suggestions for improved practices, teachers were able to strengthen their efficacy through the vicarious experiences of others.

Communities of Practice Prompted Self-Reflection

The second theme that was generated from teacher responses during interviews also reflected Bandura (1977) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) concept of mastery experiences and their role in the development of efficacy. During the communities of practice sessions, teachers were not only able to hear the successful practices of others, but they also were prompted to reflect on their own successes. As teachers answered questions posed by the facilitator, many began to recognize that they have been very effective mentors. In addition, the act of reflecting forced teachers to think beyond surface-level barriers to gain a deeper understanding of why the issues existed. By being introspective, teachers began to shift their thinking from one of blaming other systems to assessing their role in ensuring effective placement experiences. Megan Graham had an epiphany as a result of the courageous conversations sessions within the community. When the facilitator asked, "What is not nurturing about having critical conversations?", Megan and others found their thinking challenged. During her

interview, Megan talked freely in regard to how the sessions had caused her to reflect on who she is:

> *I think about growing up. I was raised to speak my mind and know that I can say what I need to say and that's okay and I can be direct. So you would think in a leadership role in your classroom, that would come very naturally because it's your room. But somewhere along the way, I've also learned that I need to, that I shouldn't be that direct. And I appreciated kind of getting taken back to where, to a place where I know my mom and dad tried to instill in me. And it kind of, like, reopened all of that and made me feel like, "Oh, okay, I can go back to my roots." And reminding myself that I know what I'm doing, so why do we ever feel like we can't just tell our student teachers? We know what we're doing. And we don't give ourselves credit for that. So I think it helped me to be more direct and more confident in what I'm asking my student teachers to do.*

Megan's comments showed that she was becoming more cognizant of the strong skills that she possessed as a mentor. As she reflected on her upbringing and who she was a person, she recognized that she is an expert and has the experience needed to add value to the preparation of pre-service candidates. By acknowledging her own mastery experiences, Megan began to express greater feelings of efficacy towards mentoring. Sandra Jackson, who was viewed as a model mentor by her colleagues, also discussed how the community of practice conversations caused her to reflect on how she interacted with pre-service candidates:

> *I did not realize that it's hard for people to tell other people, "No, that's not right. You need to do it again" or "No, that was not effective." And I didn't realize it*

was so hard for other teachers to communicate that to student teachers, just for the simple fact that I thought we are here to mentor them and guide them, and that is supposed to be the relationship. Like I'm here for you, I will guide you through the way, but we're going to have to do some things. And it was, like I said, interesting listening to the people and finding out what they thought was effective, what they thought wasn't effective. And in terms of using that to evaluate my methods to see if I really was—am I too harsh? Am I not harsh enough?

In contrast to most other team members, Sandra was challenged to reflect on whether her style was too direct or confrontational. As she listened to others' experiences, Sandra was perplexed by the idea that a mentor would be intimidated by correcting a pre-service candidate. In her opinion, it is the obligation of mentors to provide guidance and feedback to mentees. By reflecting on her purpose and style, Sandra was validated in her methods to ensure the professional development of pre-service candidates. The success of her past experiences had resulted in her feeling efficacious in her role.

Leslie Wilson also thought critically regarding her experiences with the students assigned to her classroom. Leslie has had limited issues with mentoring, and the courageous conversations caused her to question if she has been successful because of strong practices or if she was doing something wrong:

I was like, yeah, because I really haven't had a lot of issues, so then it made me reflect on myself some, too, as to whether I was doing everything I was supposed to be doing or should I be doing more? Is it normal that I haven't had more issues

similar to others that I heard about? After having some of those [courageous conversations], it was actually more of a relief, and you realize it wasn't really that difficult. I've learned that it helps to bring up concerns in a reflective manner rather than just saying you've done something wrong. And I have learned that if I'm kind of upfront, I feel like that really-getting-to-know-you part in the beginning is really good. And I just kind of tell them upfront some of the things that I think I am. And if I tell them when I do your lessons, I'm going to look for things that are strengths, and I'm also going to look for things to improve on, and I tell them upfront, okay, any issues I had before so that we may be able to avoid them. It could be my personality, too, that just is upfront with them and, like, this is what you're going to do. This is how they are done and this is when they are due. I can't imagine anyone not doing lesson plans. And I'm like, is it because of my personality where they just know that that's not going to be accepted?

Reflection has been a common theme expressed by all participants from the focus group session discussions of reflecting on your practice in order to serve as a model for others to reflecting on your practice to determine if you are interacting with pre-service candidates in the most effective manner. It is obvious from participant feedback that they value the process of thinking deeply about their work and use those thoughts as a basis for improving their interactions with others. As research has shown, it is these positive, mastery experiences that serve as the basis for continued efficacy and growth as a professional. When teachers and mentors experience success, they are able to draw on those moments in the future when challenges arise. The teachers who were most vocal in

regard to the need to reflect on how they engage with pre-service candidates openly articulated greater levels of efficacy when they shared with the group. There was an air of confidence that participants exuded as they discussed how they approached critical conversations when the need would arise.

Knowledge of Adult Learning Built the Effectiveness of the Community of Practice

Most of the intervention participants suggested that they benefitted from new knowledge gained in the more traditional model of professional learning in the summer prior to participating in the Communities of Practice meetings. Teachers stated that they needed information in the area of adult learning in order to better understand their role and the needs of their mentors. The summer presenters shared research that expanded teachers' understanding of the continuum of growth from novice to expert. The term "adults in waiting" struck a chord with mentors as they were reminded of the positionality of pre-service candidates. More specifically, teachers were challenged to reflect on the expectations that they held for mentees and to assess whether they were appropriate for their stage of professional development. The community of practice sessions then allowed time to apply their newly gained knowledge, combined with individual experiences to support each other in a professional setting.

During the courageous conversations sessions, teachers frequently referred to the summer professional learning as a basis for reflecting on how they engage in their work with pre-service candidates. Carmen Smith talked about her new frame of reference when she stated,

> *One thing that I got from the session was thinking about the continuum of expert to novice. I had never heard of or thought of that before. It was the clearest that*

I've seen those ideas presented, and it helps you. I feel like I'm a bit more understanding of some things that have been frustrating.

Carolyn Brown had a very similar epiphany in regard to approaching her mentor work with more realistic expectations of pre-service candidates. As she reflected on the benefits of the summer seminar, she said,

I think for me, it would probably be that whole mindset of training, like training these teachers that are going to become teachers, that whole novice to expert relationship because, essentially, you think, "Oh, they're coming in. They've been through these classes. They know something." Like for me, I failed to realize at times, "Wait, no, no, no, no…they're just at the beginning stages of their career," which I knew, but it's like that was more apparent. So then you craft your constructive feedback to meet where they are.

June Sanders shared a very simple, yet profound, thought on the importance of the placement experience for pre-service candidates: *"I liken it to being just as important as that residency for a doctor. It truly is."* When this comment was made, multiple teachers nodded in agreement. It was evident that mentor teachers had not thought about how significant their role was in the development of future teachers. In addition, June's analogy helped teachers to reflect on and compare how the expectations of doctors in residency differ from those of doctors in professional practice. Angela Harris reinforced June's thoughts by saying, *"So not only are we teaching our students, we're teaching these student teachers how to be what we do."*

Tammie Nicholson was also open in regard to her new perspective on pre-service candidates:

That was another thing, that they're not quite adults; like even though they're here, even though they're starting to become teachers, they're not adults. They're still, a lot of them, even if they're finished, they're going to go back and live with their parents afterwards. Both of my student teachers so far have done that. And so you're just in such a different life stage than they are. I felt like that part of it was really helpful to understand, like, who they are as people, not just when they come to the classroom, because you almost expect them to be as capable as you, but they're not anywhere near because they, one, are adults in waiting. They aren't there yet.

Carolyn Brown was very interested in gaining a better understanding of adult learning and the continuum of growth for pre-service candidates. For Carolyn, the concepts presented in the summer served as affirmation for how she interacts with her pre-service candidates and how she structures their support. Although she already engaged in many mentoring best practices, she now had a research basis to substantiate her actions. Her positive experiences and perspectives were valuable to the community as they shared ideas among the group. Carolyn described her change in understanding:

Because I think that once you flip in your mind, try not thinking about them as teachers, but thinking about them as adult learners, and they're truly a novice, you modify how you give them the instructions and really made me—I had been concerned in the past that maybe me giving them gradual release was not an appropriate model because I didn't see it in a lot of other classrooms. That kind of really reaffirmed it for me, the things that I had been systematically doing with all of my student teachers, I was like, yeah, okay, this is the right way to go.

It was evident during the community of practice sessions that the mentor teachers had spent a significant amount of time processing what they had learned. Each participant talked openly regarding their experiences and frustrations with mentoring, but they constantly referred back to the continuum of professional growth. An assumption of this theme is that mentors were more objective in their community of practice dialogues due to the knowledge they had acquired in the area of pre-service candidate development. In essence, conversations that had previously been seasoned with a tone of judgment and blame were now tempered with understanding and revised expectations. Leslie Wilson extended grace to student teachers when she recalled what it was like to be in their position:

> *It makes me reflect back to when I was doing my student teaching, or even my first year, and I kind of laugh to myself thinking of some of the things that I did, and then that's when you have to put yourself in their place, like they are just learning, so they do need time, guidance.*

The changed understanding of pre-service candidates' level of competency became a frequent topic of discussion within the community of practice sessions. As mentioned earlier, mentors seemed more understanding as they shared with each other the challenges of their roles. In addition, as they worked to determine the most effective ways to mentor, they incorporated their understanding of adult learning and the professional continuum of growth into their conversations with each other. Teachers used the community of practice to discuss their personal successes and challenges with mentoring and were able to learn from each other's experiences. By having a more realistic understanding of candidates' abilities and maturity levels, mentors were able to

restrain from unproductive venting and instead focus on ways to support pre-service candidates as "adults in waiting" who have yet to even reach the novice stage of professionalism.

Knowledge Gained Is Beneficial, But Mentors Are Uncertain Regarding Sustainability

The final theme for the third research question related to the long-term sustainability of the knowledge gained within the community of practice. All action research intervention team members expressed satisfaction with the community of practice model and articulated substantial benefit from the support provided to each other. However, participants questioned the longevity of the new skills and strategies they had gained. More specifically, as with many professional learning sessions, mentors were unsure if they would remember the skills learned when they needed them most. Tammie Nicholson summarized the challenges with most professional learning:

> *But I'm going to need it again. Because I feel like that's how it happens with professional development a lot of the time. It is like I hear it and I'm like, "Oh, that is great." But if I don't start right then, it just kind of fades away. And when I'm in it, it's like, "Oh, yes, I'm going to go back and do that right now." And then Monday comes and you get into your routine and you forget that that was a thing.*

Angela Harris had similar sentiments as she honestly shared her concerns regarding the long-term benefits of the action research project. Although Angela spoke positively in regard to the sharing of ideas among colleagues and the personal reflection that the sessions invoked within her, she was uncertain if she would be able to pull on this

knowledge when the need arose. Angela stated pointedly, *"These suggestions sound good when everything is hunky-dory. But what will we do when we all get that rock?"* June Sanders expressed similar satisfaction and apprehension: *"I think that it helped to listen to how other people deal with it. I don't want to say that I do feel more comfortable with it yet because I haven't had a chance to put it into play.*

Although the concern about being able to draw on the benefits of the community of practice when it is needed most is valid, one can assume that the more frequently teachers apply the new skills, the more ingrained they will become. In essence, as teachers utilize what they gain vicariously from others, they will eventually develop into successful mastery experiences for themselves. However, the immediacy with which teachers can practice new strategies does have an impact on their level of confidence and efficacy. Megan Graham was able to foresee how she could benefit from the community of learning sessions within the near future:

> ***"****I know that the mentee that I will have next semester is going to need more guidance. She has the most wonderful personality, great with the kids, but she will need guidance. And I'll have her in January. And so I feel like I'm going to be able to use a lot of this with her. So it made it so—I mean, I don't know, it made it so, I'm kind of like, oh, I can handle a mentor that might need a little more guidance and we might have to have a few more courageous conversations.*

Although mentor teachers presented valid concerns about their ability to sustain the knowledge gained over the past six months, one can assume the community of practice model will offer support that does not exist with traditional forms of professional learning. By establishing a true community of learners, mentors have developed a

support system among themselves. As mentors mentioned throughout their interviews, they now have relationships with colleagues with whom they had never worked closely before. With those relationships, teachers have immediate access to ideas, suggestions, affirmations, and support. Unlike other learning situations where professionals attend off-site meetings and receive new information, this job-embedded format provides mentors with a readily available cadre of colleagues who understand their needs. It is the aim of the action research planning team that the participants will discover greater sustainability due to the community that now exists within Fredrick Brown Elementary.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this action research study was to increase teacher efficacy for mentoring by increasing the benefits and reducing the barriers associated with the role. The goal of the research was to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the perceived benefits for veteran teachers who mentor pre-service teachers?

(2) What are the perceived barriers to veteran teachers' commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers?

(3) In what ways, if any, does the community of practice model support teacher efficacy as mentors?

Although conversations in the initial focus groups led to discussions that focused more on the perceived challenges of mentoring, the action research showed that teachers believe that benefits outweigh barriers. More specifically, teachers talked explicitly about how their positive mentor experiences had overshadowed their negative ones. In addition, all of the teachers in the intervention group stated that they could not imagine their work as educators without the assistance of pre-service candidates. This chapter offers conclusions and implications for future research drawn from the action research project at Fredrick Brown Elementary.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Teachers welcome the opportunity to give back to the profession through their work as mentors of pre-service candidates.

Prior to the beginning of the action research project at Fredrick Brown, teachers and leaders had engaged in multiple discussions regarding the partnership with Faith Central University and the perceived demands that it places on classroom teachers. Because of the human tendency to focus on the negative, school and university faculty had questioned whether the expectation of mentoring each semester was asking too much of mentors. However, data collected from action research intervention participants suggested the opposite. Teachers reported overwhelming satisfaction with mentoring and viewed it as a means to give back to the profession and to support teacher education. Ashley Carson summarized the sentiments expressed by others when she stated, *"Mentoring allows us to make investment in best practices that student teachers take with them and use to become better."*

The responsibilities of mentoring can be time and labor intensive. Yet, teachers viewed their role as critical in providing students with a real world stage to practice the concepts that they have learned in class. As the courageous conversations sessions progressed, participants became increasingly reflective on their past experiences as student teachers and the role their mentors played in their professional development. These experiences, both positive and negative, served as the impetus for most of the mentors to continue paying it forward. Angela Harris stated,

> *The university professors have tremendous knowledge about theory. However, many of them have never worked in a school. They have no idea what our daily*

realities are like. The students need to see what it is really like, and it's our job to help them."

The development of this conclusion is very encouraging for the PDS partnership at Fredrick Brown, as it speaks to the commitment of teachers to the task of mentoring. In addition, teachers expressed that the presence of a pre-service candidate in their classroom causes a self-imposed accountability for excellence. It was apparent that mentors not only desired to give back to the profession, but they also felt an obligation to ensure that their modeling was exemplary. Based on the affirmative responses of mentors regarding their work, it is evident that school and university administrators should focus on collaborative strategies that can be implemented to better support them in this role. The existing willingness of mentor teachers must be nurtured and strengthened so that strong placement sites can be sustained.

Conclusion 2: Challenges of mentoring can be alleviated through open communication and strong partnership between schools and university teacher education faculty.

The second conclusion generated from among the themes of this study relates strongly to the second research question. As the action research planning team members examined the responses regarding the barriers to mentoring, it was apparent that the concerns expressed by most participants were ones that could be resolved through more proactive efforts by school and university administrators. Mentors were very open and honest in expressing their ideas for greater collaboration with the university.

A repetitive theme that surfaced throughout the six months of intervention related to the feeling that university faculty should be more actively involved in all aspects of the

placement process. This involvement included more frequent university-level supervision, the provision of professional learning aligned to needs articulated by mentors, and more objective mediation when potential conflicts arise. Although teachers were initially more vocal about barriers to mentoring, they were also optimistic in regard to the positive impact that university presence could have on those challenges. Teachers offered various suggestions for ways that the school and university could work together in order to provide greater structure to the placement process. One idea that mentors posed as a means for Fredrick Brown and Faith Central partnering together involved the development of a mentor handbook that would address many of the issues that tend to arise during the practicum and student teaching placement. Leslie Wilson captured the thoughts of the group:

> *They have a syllabus for class, but maybe we should have a syllabus for practicum. Uh huh, we should, yes. Dress code, things on there about work hours, lesson plans, consequences, maybe it would be beneficial to develop in that session. We should spend some time brainstorming things you have already come up as problems and then develop a mentor handbook.*

Having more open and frequent communication between mentor teachers and university faculty was another recommendation that would lead to greater mentor satisfaction. If school and university partnerships make conscious efforts to engage in honest dialogue on a scheduled basis, the likelihood of problems mounting would be minimized. In addition, it is imperative that universities establish easily accessible communication channels for mentors to express concerns about pre-service candidates, processes, and other obstacles that they may encounter.

For the past eight years, Fredrick Brown has had a assigned to work within the school to supervise pre-service candidates, provide professional learning support, and troubleshoot issues as they arise. A recent change in the design of this role has resulted in less involvement with the supervision of candidates. Consequently, some of the proactive activities of the past are not as prevalent as they have once been. Mentor teachers recognize the value of this position and expressed a desire to have the more involved with all students. Ashley Carson expressed her opinion about the value of this position:

> *However, that is a problem I have noticed that we need to talk about. Block 3s do not know Dr. Matthew. When I say, "Why don't you go ask Dr. Matthew about this?", [they say] "I can't. I don't really know Dr. Matthew." So where my Block 4 had had him, walked with him through entire program, Block 3s do not have a relationship with him. For fall, if they could become familiar with him, so then they could feel comfortable going to him. We all feel comfortable, and they should too. That way we would all feel like we have someone to talk to when we have an issue.*

If systems and universities that implement professional development schools models desire effective placement experiences for mentors and mentees, the effort must be made to build partnerships that nurture and support all stakeholders. It is critical that the success of such placements not be left to happenstance, but rather reflect conscious efforts to formalize structures of regular communication and to plan meaningful professional learning activities designed to enhance the skills of mentors. University

faculty have an obligation to immerse themselves within the schools and to seek ways to offer their professional knowledge towards the development of a strong cadre of mentors.

Conclusion 3: Communities of practice provide a safe space for practitioners to reflect on their craft and their own needs for professional growth.

In keeping with Bandura's (1977) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) work on efficacy, this action research project reinforced the value of mastery and vicarious experiences towards the development of mentor teacher efficacy. Throughout the entire action research project, teachers talked passionately about the role of reflection in their work. During the focus group sessions, mentors stressed the necessity of being reflective concerning the art of teaching so that they could explain their actions to pre-service candidates. During the community of practice sessions, mentors constantly reflected on their actions, their words, and how both were perceived by their mentees. Teachers were very thoughtful about their work, and they sought to gain deeper understandings into who they were and why they made the decisions that they did.

The frank and honest dialogue that occurred during the sessions created a forum where teachers shared their struggles and their successes. They listened deeply to each other, offering affirmations of decisions and suggestions for future actions. As the facilitator provided prompts for discussions, teachers were able to reflect on how they had approached certain issues with mentors and processed the effectiveness of their actions. The sharing of such details amongst a group of individuals who had similar experiences and roles provided an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other and to validate their own skills. Mentors were able to think critically about their own weaknesses and identify the support that they need to feel more efficacious in their role

as mentor. In addition, it was evident that individual teachers' personal mastery experiences contributed to their confidence in mentoring, and they were able to share their strategies with others as each individual worked to strengthen the community as a whole. Team members who were viewed as more effective mentors talked specifically about how the monthly conversations forced them to be introspective regarding their practices and even to assess whether their methods were the most appropriate.

June Sanders was open about her successes and challenges and expressed an appreciation for the community of practice model:

> *The thing I enjoyed the most was all of the mentor teachers coming together, or not all of us, but several of us coming together and actually having a chance to reflect on the way that we are bringing the student teachers in and mentoring them.*

Carmen Smith shared similar thoughts regarding the benefit of being able to talk openly with other mentors about the challenges that she had faced this year. Carmen seemed to particularly appreciate how the community of practice provided a structure for her to reflect on her pre-service candidate in a manner that was solution-focused rather than simply complaining. Carmen expressed her satisfaction by stating,

> *I liked that this was not just complaining, because talking about it was the purpose of these conversations. It helped me a little bit because one of the things I've struggled with this year is complaining versus being productive. The sessions let me reflect on what had happened and then think about what I could have done different.*

An additional confirmation of this conclusion was shared by Leslie Wilson as she discussed how she was challenged to reflect on her practice as she listened to others share how they interacted with the pre-service candidates assigned to them. As Leslie recalled the sessions, she realized she had many positive mastery experiences that led to her efficacy as a mentor. However, she was not cognizant of her own strengths until she engaged in self-reflection during the courageous conversations community meetings:

> *When I spent time listening to others talk, I really thought about what I do in my classroom. I feel like I have been successful and that I have had good experiences. Now I really have thought about what I do, how I interact with my student teachers. I learned a lot from our PIR [] about sharing our likes and dislikes. I think this really has helped me avoid a lot of issues.*

Carmen Smith's term "organic teambuilding" succinctly summarizes the benefit of the community of practice model for the development of mentor teacher efficacy. Individual members were able to use the team setting to obtain feedback regarding their practices and to gain new professional knowledge from those who have firsthand experience with their struggles. Unlike a traditional professional learning session, the community of practice provided teachers with practical strategies that had been validated by those who engage in the same work as they do daily. By creating a norm of openness, honesty, and tolerance, teachers had a space dedicated to self reflection and critical thought with reference to their own abilities and related needs for professional growth.

Conclusion 4: Although communities of practice are effective, prerequisite skills are essential for meaningful participation.

The feedback from mentor teachers was overwhelmingly positive in regard to the benefit of the monthly community of practice meeting. It was evident that teachers welcomed the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with their peers as a means of giving and receiving suggestions for best practice. The forum was described by some as "therapeutic" or "group therapy" and offered a forum for teachers to receive support in areas of challenge that they faced as mentors. Although the sessions allowed teachers to expand their repertoire of skills in the area of having courageous conversations, it was apparent that engaging in these conversations alone would not have been sufficient. As teachers reflected on their experiences with the community of practice, they acknowledged that their conversations were more productive because they had gained a deeper knowledge of developmental needs of pre-service candidates.

The provision of professional learning targeted at addressing the identified barriers of understanding adult learners and the stages of professional growth provided teachers with an objective frame of reference from which to address the needs of pre-service candidates. While teachers appreciated having a forum designed for them to talk with others who have common experiences, they recognized that simply talking about their issues would not resolve their concerns. Instead, they needed to have an understanding of how to support pre-service teachers in their transition from students to professionals. Based on Benner's (1984) model for the stages of clinical competence with nurses, presenters guided mentors in understanding the movement of pre-service candidates through the stages of novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficient, and

expert. Once exposed to this body of research, teachers quickly acknowledged that many of their problems were due to the unrealistic expectation of pre-service candidates entering their classrooms at the proficient level. As mentors explicitly learned the stages of development, they were forced to reflect on their own beginning and challenged to think differently about the needs of mentees. Tammie Nicholson shared feedback that reflected the thoughts of other group members:

> *I like that novice to adult session. It was a good initial training, initial professional development to have and then to go into the year having some time where we listened and learned in our group with each other, and then have a lot of time to delve into that a little more in our conversation. I liked that.*

Carolyn Brown also offered similar thoughts supporting the need for mentors to have a basic understanding of their responsibilities and the art of teaching adults prior to engaging in community of practice sessions:

> *Well, I think you have to have, initially, you have to have some knowledge that you get. And I think for me, the big thing, I mean, I enjoyed the mentor ones that we did initially a couple of years ago and having some time to try it and the co-teaching models and those kinds of things within. But then, that was a bit of a struggle. But now once I started thinking about it as these are adult learners, they are novices, and I modified how I instruct them. Then, I used what I learned to help me in our courageous conversations talks.*

A level of foundational understanding is necessary to undergird the work of mentors in the field. Schools and universities must work collaboratively to identify key knowledge that all mentors need in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their role. In

addition, regular dialogue must occur in order to stay abreast of changing needs that mentors may have. While there are some prerequisite knowledge areas that have been identified in literature and by this action research study, university faculty must recognize that these needs are fluid based on the skill sets of individual mentors.

The community of practice was substantiated by members having a foundational understanding of how to supervise instruction and teach adults. Data collected during this action research study support this conclusion, as teachers repeatedly mentioned how enlightened they were after receiving professional learning on the novice to adult continuum. Language from this session was heard throughout the community of practice meetings as mentors talked about the need to tailor their support and expectations to reflect the developmental stage of their mentee.

Conclusion 5: Communities of practice are more successful when supported by a knowledgeable and unbiased facilitator.

Although communities of practice support the organic development of teams, mentor teachers felt that this model is most beneficial when discussions are guided by a skilled facilitator. Teachers were very vocal during each community of practice meeting as they reflected on their past experiences and shared ideas with each other. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning is based on the premise of professionals learning collectively from each other within the natural setting of their practice. For mentors, having the designated time and space to participate in productive dialogue with other professionals was affirming and enlightening. However, action research participants stressed that these meetings were most beneficial because the conversations were led by a knowledgeable facilitator.

A significant aspect of this conclusion is that the facilitator be trained in allowing the natural progression of communication within a community of practice setting. It is essential that the role of facilitator not be confused with that of a presenter. As a facilitator, the goal is to provide prompts and parameters, but not material. The facilitator for our discussions offered some guiding questions and areas for clarification, while also challenging mentors to be reflective about their experiences and related thoughts and feelings. However, he never monopolized the conversation, nor did he suggest to participants what areas warranted their time and conversations. Megan Graham commented on the role of the facilitator in her interview:

> *He did a great job as a facilitator, not a dictator. And I liked him not jumping in and saying, "Okay, well, we're not talking about that right now. Let's think about* this.*" He took anything that you felt was relevant, and he figured out a way to make it relevant to everyone else as well.*

Angela Harris had similar ideas regarding the value of the facilitator in the community of practice meetings:

> *I think he, our facilitator, helped to bring that devil's advocacy kind of thinking, like "Wait, maybe they're not thinking about it this way. They're thinking about it like that." So you're like, "Oh, wait, I didn't think about it." So it helped me to think outside of, in my brain, what it should look like.*

Multiple participants addressed the important role that the facilitator served in the community of practice dialogues. As each person expressed their personal experiences with the monthly sessions, they also were verbal in regard to the need to have an

objective facilitator to stimulate their thinking. Tammie Nicholson captured the thoughts of many when she said,

> *He was good at leading the discussion, bringing some questions, but really, he did very minimal talking the whole time, and it was learning from everybody else and just hearing their experiences. And I think that's what somebody who is really good at facilitating discussion does. He takes you a step deeper than you would have gone if he hadn't been there, but you're the one who is leading the discussion.*

The idea of going "a step deeper" perfectly summarizes the importance of a facilitator to a community of practice. The basic knowledge gained in these communities is generated from the experiences of the participants. Mentors were able to grow in their efficacy by listening to the experiences of others, while also reflecting on why they, themselves, had been successful. Engaging in dialogue with others who share the same point of reference and similar professional encounters can enhance one's professional growth. However, a danger can be that participants become marred in a mode of complaining and fail to move to the stage of productivity and problem solving. The presence of a skilled facilitator allows ample time for participants to verbalize their frustrations and then channels their energy to collaboratively seeking solutions for growth.

Implications

The findings from this action research study provide insights for those at multiple levels of education settings. Mentor preparation and efficacy are essential to the development of effective placement sites, and it is imperative that educator preparation

faculty recognize the professional learning needs of mentors. This study offers guidance for mentor teachers, district administrators, university faculty, and educational leaders.

For Action Research Participants

This action research project has offered multiple levels of benefits for action research planning and intervention participants. For the action research planning team, the cycle of research provided an unbiased view of mentor teachers' perceptions of mentoring and of the areas of professional learning which were needed to increase their efficacy. As school leaders and university faculty, we all had preconceived beliefs regarding how to best support mentors. We also have articulated the benefits of mentoring in many local, state, and national settings without hearing the voices of mentors themselves. By engaging in focus group discussions and individual interviews, we received confirmation for some of our assumptions and had our eyes opened to benefits, challenges, and needs that we had never anticipated.

Action research intervention team members also experienced significant benefits by participating in this project. The primary implication for intervention team members was the development of job-embedded professional learning that was truly reflective of their individual needs. In addition, these team members were able to learn about the action research process and are now able to enact it as a means of constructing and planning action for practice-related problems. Finally, intervention team members are now versed in the skills needed to think critically about their professional practice and to view problems as opportunities for action.

For the District

The findings of the action research team can be generalized at some level to other Model 4 professional development schools within the district. There are two Model 4 elementary schools within Means County, and they both host an entire cohort of pre-service candidates. Consequently, many of the challenges faced at Fredrick Brown are common to her sister school. During the Professional Development Schools District Collaborative, common conversations reflect mentor professional learning needs and how to ensure that the partnership is mutually beneficial for both school and university partners. Implications from this study can serve as a basis for planning district-wide professional learning to prepare mentors for their role. More importantly, the process of engaging in action research with mentor teachers can be a valuable tool to help each school unearth the benefits and challenges of mentoring within their building, thereby developing more efficacious and committed mentors across the district.

For the University

Data from this study suggest that it is helpful for teacher education faculty to engage in regular conversations with mentors in order to hear their concerns and needs. Additionally, efforts should be made to develop professional learning modules that support their knowledge of adult learning and supervision of instruction. It was apparent from teacher feedback that university faculty members cannot assume that strong elementary teachers are inherently strong teacher educators. Teachers receive substantial training in the instructional practices needed to work effectively with K-5 students. These skills do not automatically transfer to their work with pre-service candidates. University partners must recognize this gap in learning and provide appropriate supports

for those who are asked to mentor. University faculty also should listen to the practical experiences of mentors and should seek ways to influence policy and curriculum decisions that address concerns shared.

For Educational Leaders

Findings from this study offer insight into the field of educational leadership, as school leaders must be aware of the range of differences in expectations and related skill sets for different types of mentors. Teachers who are asked to support new colleagues in teacher induction programs provide ancillary support and feedback. In contrast, mentors of pre-service candidates are indeed teacher educators. This level of responsibility for another individual's professional training requires an understanding of adult learning principles, supervision of instruction, and clear articulation of the roles of mentors. Educational leaders should not haphazardly assign teachers to the task of mentoring without some form of structured professional learning.

Additionally, this work should be a collaborative initiative between school leaders and faculty of university-level teacher preparation programs. By working together, leaders can ensure that teachers are supported in the additional duties assigned to them that extend beyond their work with students in their classrooms. Finally, educational leaders should embrace communities of practice and job-embedded professional learning and should consider designing sessions based on input from the targeted audience. By acknowledging teachers' professional knowledge and considering their insights regarding their needs for growth, educational leaders are able to structure valuable learning opportunities that are respectful of teacher input.

My Role as the Researcher

Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) work on action research not only provided guidance on the cycle of action research, but also elicited some critical thoughts for the action researcher or participant researcher to consider. According to the authors, "an important part of the action research dissertation is reflection on your own learning" (p. 171). They continue by stating that "the project may have challenged many of your assumptions, attitudes, skills and existing organizational relationships" (p. 171). Although I read Coghlan and Brannick's book when I began planning for my action research, I did not fully grasp the two quotes above until I had completed the project. My delay in understanding what the authors presented reflected something I learned during one of my qualitative courses—that adult learners cannot fully grasp new knowledge until they are ready. In completing the action research cycle, my mind was expanded to be able to better understand my role as participant researcher.

The proverbial light bulb ignited in my mind as I reread the author's work at the conclusion of my action research study. Indeed, the feedback provided by mentor teachers of Fredrick Brown Elementary enlightened me to areas of need that I had not considered. I entered this research project with preconceived beliefs about the needs of our mentor teachers. In an effort to be true to the research process, I laid aside my assumptions and anxiously anticipated the feedback that would be garnered from our initial focus group sessions. Admittedly, I still held some ideas within the recesses of my mind and had created a rough draft of what the professional learning would entail. Once I completed the initial focus group sessions and analyzed the transcripts for each meeting, I heard voices that either had not been expressed or had not been heard before. It was at

that moment that I truly grasped the value of my role as participant researcher and understood the necessity of my being objective during the action research process.

During the cycles of the research study, I recognized that although I consider myself an open and democratic leader, I cannot speak for those that I lead. There were areas where I was accurate about the benefits and challenges of mentoring. However, the primary professional learning needs that mentors identified were not areas that I had identified, nor had they been discovered in my research of the literature. Instead, they were needs that were reflective of each individual who participated in the action research. As the lead participant researcher, I finally discovered my most important role in this process. I had a personal, professional, and ethical obligation to guide my action research team through an objective process of identifying their needs and planning an intervention that addressed those needs. In order to achieve this goal, I had to remove myself and respect the contributions of the whole. While it was challenging as the building leader to step away from the role of primary decision maker, the ultimate success of the project was dependent on the collaborative voices of the action research team.

Knowledge Created From the Action Research Study

The findings and conclusions of this action research study have provided valuable insights to the field of mentor teacher preparation. By examining mentors' perceptions of the barriers that inhibit their commitment to mentoring, the researchers were able to design professional learning that specifically addressed identified areas of need. Teachers at Fredrick Brown Elementary and teacher education faculty from Faith Central University now have a common understanding of skills that mentors feel are necessary for them to effectively engage in their roles. Additionally, university faculty have a basis

for planning modules to prepare teachers prior to assigning pre-service candidates to their classrooms. It was evident from the participants' feedback that mentors are teacher educators and they need to be prepared as such. One cannot casually bestow the responsibilities of mentoring on teachers without ensuring that a foundational knowledge of how to effectively mentor has been established. Although the learning needs of mentors can vary among individuals and schools, two themes emerged that should be universal among all mentors: (1) understanding the continuum of professional ability as skills progress from novice to expert, and (2) being confident in the ability to engage pre-service candidates in courageous conversations to support their instructional growth.

Impact on Future Research

Due to the extensive time spent by the action research planning team and intervention team on courageous conversations, it is suggested that additional studies be conducted on why such dialogue is a challenge for elementary teachers. More specifically, as participant researcher, I found value in the discussions regarding the role of gender in courageous conversations, as well as the differences between elementary and secondary teachers. Multiple participants expressed questions in the area of how gender can influence an individual's comfort with having direct conversations. Since a majority of elementary teachers are female, one would assume that this correlation is due to the prevalence of women in these settings. However, research conducted in a secondary school setting could allow for diversity in gender of mentor teachers in order to further study how it can impact willingness to engage in critical conversations.

Another topic for future research consideration that surfaced during this action research relates to how race impacts the mentor/mentee relationship within the school

setting. Participants talked candidly regarding how it seems that African American mentors have a natural ability to address challenging topics. Several conversations lead to White participants sharing perceptions about the communication style of African American mentors and the related effectiveness in regard to mentoring. During these same sessions, African American mentors talked openly about the challenges that they have faced as mentors and the difficulty that some White pre-service candidates have with their directness during supervision. By exploring case studies of African American mentors and the pre-service students assigned to them, researchers may be able to better understand how race impacts the mentoring relationship.

Summary of the Action Research Study

The theoretical lenses of efficacy, social exchange, and communities of practice served as the framework for designing this action research case study. Each of these theories contributed to understanding the need for such research and to the formation of research questions and development of the related interventions. In the review of literature, the following quote was used to explain the value of social exchange theory: "The idea that reciprocity drives social exchange theory implies that people engage in a relationship if the outcome of such engagement is greater than their effort" (Lejonberg & Christophersen, 2015, p. 55). The action research study conducted at Fredrick Brown Elementary explored the costs and benefits for mentors and then utilized customized professional learning as a means of mitigating articulated costs by increasing teacher efficacy for mentoring.

Action research was the ideal tool for teachers, school leaders, and university faculty to address the problem of mentor teacher efficacy and commitment. By working

collaboratively on the action research cycles, teachers had ownership of the process and the related solutions. In addition, the bonds that developed among the intervention team will serve as a foundation for in-building supports and future problem-solving efforts. The professional and personal reflection that each participant engaged in during the study not only supported her individual efficacy for mentoring, but strengthened the professional community of the school. In essence, the community of practice model inherently developed a community of colleagues.

After completing the intervention, the research team evaluated the effectiveness of the professional learning and of the community of practice model. The data generated by multiple sources reiterated the importance of mentors being supported in addressing the identified barriers to serving in their roles. In addition, qualitative responses from participants were favorable towards the use of a community of practice model as the means of providing professional learning. More specifically, it was evident that mentors value the opportunity to learn vicariously from each other and that the sharing of such experiences strengthens their personal efficacy as they reflect on their past successes. During her end-of-intervention interview, Megan Graham shared her excitement about being a member of the action research intervention team. As a teacher leader, Megan is energized by opportunities to advance her professional knowledge. When reflecting on the overall impact of the research project, Megan shared,

> *And if we want to keep our passion going and we want to keep ourselves excited, then we need all of this stuff. I mean, we do. In a school like this, in a district like this, we've got to have it.*

Carolyn Brown, also a reflective educator who enjoys reading about best practices and applying her newly gained knowledge, summarized the overall benefits of participating in the action research process:

> *Well, and it helped your practice—I think that that's the thing that makes education exciting. When you can find things that kind of expand how you think about it because if you're—if you get stale, the kids can feel it and the student teachers can feel it. But having that new way of thinking about it kind of made it exciting for me. And it keeps things from getting bad. And that's what I always tell my student teachers, you always want to listen to any staff development, even if you don't feel like it's appropriate for your class at that time because just because it's not appropriate for that group doesn't mean that it's going to be something that's like an ah-ha moment for another group. So always try to learn and think about it and put it in practice. Save the notes; you never know when you're going to need them.*

Feedback provided by these teachers reflected comments made by most of the participants as they discussed their overall experiences with the action research. Data collected through focus group meetings, field notes, courageous conversations, and interviews confirm that the intended purpose of this action research project was met. The proposed research questions were answered and new insights were gained regarding how to best improve mentor teacher efficacy and commitment at Fredrick Brown Elementary. In addition, participants are now skilled in the action research process and have a new tool to address other problems of practice as concerns arise.

REFERENCES

Ambrosetti, A. (2012). *The impact of preparing mentor teachers for mentoring.* Paper presented at the Joint Australian Association for Research in Education and Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association Conference.

Ambrosetti, A. (2014). Are you ready to be a mentor? Preparing teachers for mentoring pre-service teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(6), 29-42.

Allen, J. M., Ambrosetti, A., & Turner, D. (2013). How school and university supervising staff perceive the pre-service teacher education practicum: A comparative study. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(4), 108-128.

Atiles, J., & Pinholster, L. (2013). Student teaching: Reflections of a relentless journey. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 34*(4), 308-319.

Arhar, J., Niesz, T., Brossmann, J., Koebley, S., O'Brien, K., Loe, D., & Black, F. (2013). Creating a "third space" in the context of a university-school partnership: Supporting teacher action research and the research preparation of doctoral students. *Educational Action Research, 21*(2), 218-236.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Bulletin, 84*, 191-215.

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist,28*(2), 117-148.

Bates, A. J., & Burbank, M. D. (2008). Effective student teacher supervision in the era of No Child Left Behind. *The Professional Educator, 32*(2), 1-11.

Benner, P. E. (1984). From novice to expert: Excellence and power in clinical nursing practice. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.

Bloomfield, D. (2009). Working with and against neoliberal accreditation agendas: Opportunities for professional experience. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *37*(1), 27-44.

Bradbury, L. (2010). Educative mentoring: Promoting reform-based science teaching through mentoring relationships. *Science Education, 94*(6), 1049-1071.

Bryan, H., & Carpenter, C. (2008). Mentoring: A practice developed in community? *Journal of Inservice Education, 34*(1), 47-59.

Caldarella, P., Gomm, R. J., Shatzer, R. H., & Wall, D. G. (2010). School-based mentoring: A study of volunteer motivations and benefits. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 2*(2), 199-216.

Cheng, C. (2014). Situated learning and professional development: A case study of applying cognitive apprenticeship and community of practices in a kindergarten. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 59*, 15-22.

Childre, A., & Van Rie, G. (2015). Mentor teacher training: A hybrid model to promote partnering in candidate development. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 34*(1), 10-16.

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2014). *Doing action research in your own organization* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Cooper, P. (2013). Preparing multicultural educators in an age of teacher evaluation systems: Necessary stories from field supervision. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 40*(2), 7-27.

Cope, P., Cuthbertson, P., & Stoddart, B. (2000). Situated learning in the practice placement. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31*(4), 850-856.

Danielson, L. (2002). Developing and retaining quality classroom teachers through mentoring. Clearing House. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ646863).

Ediger, M. (2009). Supervising the student teacher in the public school. *Education, 130*(2), 251-254.

Elliott, B., & Calderhead, J. (1994). Mentoring for teacher development: Possibilities and caveats. In D. McIntyre, H. Hagger, & M. Wilkin (Eds.), *Mentoring: Perspectives on school-based teacher education* (pp. 166-189). London, England: Kogan Page.

Engstrom, M. E., & Danielson, L. M. (2006). *Teachers' perceptions of an on-site staff development model.* Philadelphia, PA: Heldref Publications.

Evertson, C. M., & Smithey, M. W. (2000). Mentoring effects on protégés/classroom practice: An experimental field study. *The Journal of Educational Research, 93*(5), 294-304.

Fairbanks, C., Freedman, D., & Kahn, C. (2000). The role of effective mentors in learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(2), 102-112.

Faucette, N., & Nugent, P. (2012). Preservice teachers' responses to a peer mentoring innovation: The "leavers" and "completers." *Education, 132*(3), 548-559.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). Helping novices learn to teach: Lessons from an exemplary support teacher. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(1), 17-30.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (1996). Teacher mentoring: A critical review. ERIC Digests. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. ED 397 060.

Freiberg, M. R., Zbikowski, J., & Ganser, T. (1996). *Where do we go from here? Decisions and dilemmas of teacher mentors.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395930.pdf

Giebelhaus, C. R., & Bowman, C. (2000). *Teaching mentors: Is it worth the effort?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet ?accno=ED438277

Gimbert, B. G. (2001). *The power of multiple mentoring in the context of a professional development school: E pluribus unum—out of many, one.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved November 12, 2015 from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED455211.pdf

Gimbert, B., & Nolan, J. F., Jr. (2003). The influence of the professional development school context on supervisory practice: A university supervisor's and interns' perspective. *Journal of Curriculum & Supervision, 18*(4), 353-379.

Glenn, W. J. (2006). Model versus mentor: Defining the necessary qualities of the effective cooperating teacher. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 33*(1), 85-95.

Hardy, G., Spendlove, D. & Shortt, D. (2015). Changing expectations, same perspective: Preservice teachers' judgments of professional efficacy. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(2), 145-169.

Hawkey, K. (1997). Roles, responsibilities, and relationships in mentoring: A literature review and agenda for research. *Journal of Teacher Education, 48*(5), 325-335.

Harford, J., & MacRuairc, G. (2008). Engaging student teachers in meaningful reflective practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(7), 1884-1892. doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2008.02.010

Hennissen, P., Crasborn, F., Brouwer, N., Korthagen, F., & Bergen, T. (2011). Clarifying pre-service teacher perceptions of mentor teachers' developing use of mentoring skills. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*, 1049-1058. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011 .03.009

Hobson, L. D., Harris, D., Buckner-Manley, K., & Smith, P. (2012). The importance of mentoring novice and pre-service teachers: Findings from a HBCU student teaching program. *Educational Foundations, 26*(3-4), 67-80.

Holloway, J. H. (2001). The benefits of mentoring. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8), 85-86.

Homans, G. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology, 63*(6),597-606.

Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education,21*(4), 343-356.

Hudson, P. (2007). Examining mentors' practices for enhancing pre-service teachers' pedagogical development in mathematics and science. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning 15*(2), 201-217.

Hudson, P. (2013). Mentoring as professional development: Growth for both mentor and mentee. *Professional Development in Education, 39*(5), 771-783. doi:10.1080/19415257.2012 .749415

Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2010). Mentor educators' understandings of mentoring preservice primary teachers. *International Journal of Learning, 17*(2), 157-169.

Hudson, P., Usak, M., & Savran-Gencer, A. (2009). Employing the five-factor mentoring instrument: Analysing mentoring practices for teaching primary science. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 32*(1), 63-74. doi:10.1080/02619760802509115.

Janssen, S., van Vuuren, M., & de Jong, M. (2014). Motives to mentor: Self-focused, protege-focused, relationship-focused, organization-focused, and unfocused motives. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *85*(3), 266-275.

Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(2), 129-169.

Klinge, C. (2015). A conceptual framework for mentoring in a learning organization. *Adult Learning, 26*(4), 160-166.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Lejonberg, E., & Christophersen, K. (2015). School-based mentors' affective commitment to the mentor role: Role clarity, self-efficacy, mentor education and mentor experience as antecedents. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, *13*(2), 45-63.

Leshem, S. (2014). How do teacher mentors perceive their role, does it matter? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(3), 261-274.

Lynch, D., & Smith, R. (2012). Teacher education partnerships: An Australian research-based perspective. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(11), 131-146.

Moulding, L. Stewart, P, & Dunmeyer, M. (2014). Pre-service teachers'' sense of efficacy: Relationship to academic ability, student teaching placement characteristics and mentor support. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 41,* 60-66.

National Association of Professional Development Schools. (2008). What it means to be a professional development school. Retrieved July 11, 2015, from http://www.napds.org/9%20Essentials/statement.pdf

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2001). Standards for professional development schools. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.ncate.org

Nesheim, N. E., Moran, C. M., & Pendleton, M. (2014). Building bridges: How to increase the efficacy of teacher mentors and student-teacher programs. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, *17*(3), 48-58.

Nolan, J. (2000). *The influence of the professional development school context on my practice as a student teaching supervisor: A personal narrative.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved November 20, 2015, from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED447068.pdf

O'Brian, M., Stoner, J., Appel, K., & House, J. J. (2007). The first field experience: Perspectives of preservice and cooperating teachers. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 30*(4), 264-275.

Orland-Barak, L. (2001). Learning to mentor as learning a second language of teaching. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 31*(1), 53-68.

Patton, K., Griffin, L., Sheehy, D., Arnold, R., & Gallo, A. (2005). Chapter 2: Navigating the mentoring process in a research-based teacher development project: A situated learning perspective. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 24*, 302-325.

Pennsylvania State University. (2015). What is Professional Development School? Retrieved July 11, 2015, from https://www.ed.psu.edu/pds/elementary

Petersen, J. E., & Treagust, D. F. (2014). School and university partnerships: The role of teacher education institutions and primary schools in the development of preservice teachers' science teaching efficacy. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(9), 153-167.

Rice, R. (2007). The mentor's use of adult learning theories: Are theory and practice co-extensive? Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference. Retrieved from http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents /166216.htm

Rodgers, A., & Keil, V. L. (2007). Restructuring a traditional student teacher supervision model: Fostering enhanced professional development and mentoring within a professional development school context. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, 63-80. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.012.

Rutti, R., Helms, M., & Rose, L. (2013). Changing the lens: Viewing the mentoring relationship as relational structures in a social exchange framework. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 34*(5), 446-468.

Sagor, R. (2011). *The action research guidebook: A four-stage process for educators and school teams.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Sandholtz, J., & Dadlez, S. (2000). Professional development school trade-offs in teacher preparation and renewal. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 27*(1),7-27.

Sayeski, K. L., & Paulsen, K. J. (2012). Student teacher evaluations of cooperating teachers as indices of effective mentoring. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 39*(2), 117-130.

Scheetz, J., Waters, F. H., Smeaton, P., & Lare, D. (2005). Mentoring in a PDS program: What's in it for me? *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 42*(1), 33-37.

Schussler, D. L. (2006). The altered role of experienced teachers in professional development schools: The present and its possibilities. *Issues in Teacher Education, 15*(2), 61-75.

Sempowicz, T., & Hudson, P. (2012). Mentoring pre-service teachers' reflective practices towards producing teaching outcomes. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, 10*(2), 52-64.

Simoncini, K. M., Lasen, M., & Rocco, S. (2014). Professional dialogue, reflective practice and teacher research: Engaging early childhood pre-service teachers in collegial dialogue about curriculum innovation. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(1), 26-44.

Simons, H. (2009). *Case study in practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Sinclair, C., Dowson, M., & Thistleton-Martin. (2006). Motivations and profiles of cooperating teachers: Who volunteers and why? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*, 263-279.

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guildford Press.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(6), 944-956.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 783-805.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2), 202-248.

United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform: A report to the nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. Washington, D.C.: The Commission.

United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform—A report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education. Washington, DC: The Commission: [Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. distributor]

University of Georgia. (2015). College of Education. Professional Development School District. Retrieved from http://coe.uga.edu/directory/units/professional-development-school-district

Uusimaki, L. (2013). Empowering pre-service teacher supervisors' perspectives: A relational-cultural approach towards mentoring. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(7), 45-58.

Walkington, J. (2005). Mentoring preservice teachers in the preschool setting: Perceptions of the role. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 30*(1), 28-35.

Yaman, S. (2013). Supervision and the roles of supervisors within the context of preservice teacher education in Turkey. *International Journal of Academic Research*, *5*(5), 227-232.

Yendol-Hoppey, D., Dana, N., & Delane, D. (2009). Inquiry-oriented mentoring in the professional development school: Two illustrations. *School University Partnerships, 3*(1), 6-13.

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Teacher Efficacy for Mentoring Pre-service Candidates in a Professional Development School: A Case for Action Research

Researcher's Statement
We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Bryant
Educational Administration and Policy
bryantkc@uga.edu
Co-Investigator: Xernona Thomas
xjt42955@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine benefits and hindrances to mentor commitment and implement a community of practice model to increase teacher efficacy for mentoring.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- Participate in focus groups to examine factors that impact mentor experiences. At the end of your participation in the School's Professional Learning in the summer and follow-up sessions in the fall semester, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to assess changes in mentor practices and understanding of the mentor role and related skills.
- This action research study is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2016 with a focus group that is expected to last approximately 1 ½ hours. Focus group sessions will be audio recorded. The end of semester semi-structured interview will last for one hour and will have questions designed to solicit your feedback on the effectiveness of the professional learning provided and its impact on your practices as a mentor.

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts from participating in this research.

Benefits
- This study is not expected to directly benefit you.
- The expected benefit to the field of education is strengthening of teacher education programs through more effective preparation of mentor teachers. An additional benefit is greater organizational commitment for mentor teachers based on increased efficacy for mentoring.

Incentives for participation
There are no incentives for participating in this study.

Audio Recording
Audio recording devices will be used to maintain accurate documentation or transcripts of conversations held during focus group discussions and semi-structured interview. Transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research. If you do not agree to recording of the focus group conversations and semi-structured interview, you will not be able to participate in the research study. However, if you would like to share information to be considered for inclusion in the mentor professional learning session without participating in the research study, you may provide this information directly to the school professor in residence.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All data obtained from the study will be collected and maintained confidentially. Information obtained during focus group discussions will not be associated with any individual, but instead will be compiled in summary form.
Information shared in the focus group setting should be kept confidentially and should not be shared by participants outside of the group setting. The researcher cannot guarantee the confidentiality of anything shared during the focus group setting. Information obtained from semi-structured interviews will be reported with will also be maintained confidentially and pseudonyms will be used to report responses.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate or not will not influence your employee evaluations or other performance assessments related to your employment or your working relationship with the researchers conducting this study. You may still participate in the School's Professional Learning even if you decide not to participate in the research.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information collected from you or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information that can still be identified as yours.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Karen Bryant, an assistant *professor* at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Bryant at bryantkc@uga.edu or at *706-542-1539* or Xernona Thomas at xjt42955@uga.edu or (706) 548-7281 ext. 45200. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX B

Teacher Efficacy for Mentoring Pre-service Candidates in a Professional Development School: A Case for Action Research

Xernona J. Thomas

JJ Harris Action Research Focus Group Questions

1. What do you enjoy most about the PDS at JJ Harris?
2. What would you consider some of the benefits to mentoring pre-service teachers?
3. What would you consider some of the challenges or barriers to mentoring?
4. What skills do you think are needed as a mentor to best prepare you for this role?

- *Communication; generational issues*
- *Dealing with conflict*
- *Interacting with parents*
- *Preparing effective instruction, assessments*
- *Handling differences in personality*
- *Discipline, difficult behaviors*

5. What supports could be provided to help you overcome the stated barriers?

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. What did you achieve from the mentor efficacy professional learning?
2. Do you feel that the community of practice model was beneficial? (Compared to a more lecture style format)
3. How did the session change how you mentor pre-service teachers?
4. Describe one or two changes that you have noticed in your practice as a mentor.
5. How did the course change your understanding of your role as a mentor?
6. What is your current perception of your efficacy for mentoring?
7. Do you perceive a change in your mentoring efficacy after the professional learning session?
8. Was there a mentor related topic that you would have benefitted from that was not included in the professional learning session?

APPENDIX D

Action Research Recruiting Email and Letter

In order to recruit participants for the study, I sent an email correspondence to our entire staff through the district's email system to determine if there was interest in the project. Below is the text from the message I sent on April 25, 2016:

As many of you know, I am conducting my graduate school action research on teacher preparation for mentoring in a PDS school. My goal is to work with Dr. Dresden and Dr. Bob to design an effective professional learning session for mentors based on feedback given by teachers.

We have designated two days for focus group discussions: May 9 and 11 from 3:00-4:30. Tomorrow we will send out a Google form for those interested to complete indicating their meeting preference today. Please know that this is totally voluntary.

Attached to this email is a letter explaining the process.

> Dear Fredrick Brown Elementary Mentor Teachers:
>
> I am graduate student under the direction of Dr. Karen Bryant in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled Teacher Efficacy for Mentoring Pre-Service Candidates in a PDS. The purpose of this study is obtain information about the professional learning needs of mentor teachers and to measure perceived changes in practice after participation in related trainings.

You're eligible to be in this study if you mentor a pre-service candidate at Fredrick Brown Elementary School and participate in the Professional Learning during the summer and follow-up sessions in the fall.

Your research participation will involve a focus group meeting to discuss mentoring at JJ Harris that will last approximately 1 ½ hours, and possibly a one hour post interview during at the end of the Fall semester. There are no foreseeable risks for participation in this study. This study is not expected to directly benefit the participants but findings may help improve of teacher education.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to call me at ext. 45200 or Dr. Karen Bryant at 706-542-2214 or send an e-mail to xjt42955@uga.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Xernona J. Thomas