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UTILIZING MENTOR TEXTS IN ELEMENTARY LITERACY INSTRUCTION

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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DEDICATION

To my family and my friends for all your love and support throughout my journey. You were my rock through this portion of my life. Thank you to my Capstone Committee.

You eased all my worries throughout my completion of this project. A great deal of thanks goes to my students and their families for motivating me every day to be the best teacher that I can be.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Research Question

Literacy has always played a huge role in my life. On my first day of kindergarten, I vividly remember sitting on the rug listening to my teacher. She was reading us picture books. I was on the edge of my seat wanting to know what would happen next. In first grade, I remember reading my first chapter book on my own. I was so proud of what I had accomplished. As I progressed throughout elementary school, I remember receiving my first writer's journal. This journal is where I fell in love with being a writer. I remember writing and having dreams to grow up and be like famous authors, authors such as Ann M. Martin, Kate DiCamillo, and Chris Van Allsburg. They were my mentors. I was captivated by my teachers using these authors to teach me. I was unaware that my teachers were using these detailed books as mentor texts to teach me foundational skills for reading and writing. These mentor texts would soon become a huge part of my world as a teacher and lead me to my capstone project question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?*

In this chapter, you will discover what mentor texts are. You will discover the context of my project. In addition, you will hear about my story with literacy, and you will see how my passion for mentor texts developed over time. You will read about my life as a student, my life as an educator, and my life as a graduate student at Hamline University. You will discover how it all led me to my burning question. I will also address the importance of this capstone question in education and, more specifically, in

my fourth grade classroom. Finally, I will summarize my chapter and address the layout of the rest of my chapters.

Rationale

My interest in this topic derives from my work with elementary age students. In particular, the students in my current suburban school district. In my school district, we have recently adopted a new curriculum, *Being A Writer* (Regan, Alldredge, & Binkley, 2014). This curriculum focuses on the use of mentor texts while teaching literacy skills. Each unit involves the use of mentor texts. As I progress in my teaching career, I continue to notice the importance of mentor texts in literacy instruction.

In order to further understand my reason behind using mentor texts in the classroom and my capstone project, it is important to understand what a mentor text is. According to Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), “Mentor texts are pieces of literature that we can return to again and again as we help our young writers learn how to do what they may not yet be able to do on their own” (p. 2). Furthermore, they state, “We believe a mentor text is a book that offers myriad possibilities for our students and for ourselves as writers” (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, p. 3). Finally, they address the use of mentor texts. “They have been revisited many times to help students examine an unusual sentence structure, find the poetry in prose, connect with their own memories, think about how a setting creates a mood, or find the places where an author shows instead of tells” (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, p. 4). Mentor texts are used as models to teach writers and readers new skills.

It is important that throughout my research I discover how elementary teachers can utilize mentor texts in literacy instruction because of the impact it can have on my students' engagement, my students' achievement, and on my ability to provide authentic purposes for reading and writing.

This project is important because it is crucial for students to develop a love for literacy. Developing a love for literacy will set students up to be successful adults. Mentor texts should provide opportunities for engagement and learning while fostering a love for reading and writing. My classroom, my students, and my school will benefit from the research throughout this process. Mentor texts will be used to change reading and writing instruction.

Context

When I started my journey to further my education at Hamline University, I was introduced to profound researchers in the literacy field. Linda Gambrell was the literacy work enthusiast that I found myself relating to most. She was passionate about mentor texts in the literacy classroom. According to Gambrell (2011) she saw the impact that mentor texts have on student engagement and student achievement. I was hooked and I knew that mentor texts would become deeply woven into my classroom and teaching philosophy.

The purpose of my capstone is to do an in-depth study of the impact of mentor texts in a classroom setting, specifically in elementary classrooms. I want to discover what mentor texts are used for, how they engage students, and how they impact student

achievement. I believe that mentor texts bring a love and passion to literacy that other lessons and skill isolation does not.

My desire for this project is to have a strong understanding of literacy based instruction through the use of mentor texts. Once I complete my capstone, I will have a professional development created to provide the importance of using mentor texts, how to utilize mentor texts, and a list of mentor texts teachers can utilize in their elementary classrooms. Furthermore, I plan to share my work with my students, my colleagues, and my district. These people are the stakeholders in my project. I am hopeful this will impact the future of the students in my school.

Experience

In this section, I will provide you with my educational background and my career that proves to be significant in this project. You will discover how my literacy path was influenced through the use of mentor texts. In addition, you will find the importance that my courses at Hamline University have had on my passion for mentor texts. Finally, you will see how mentor texts play a role in my classroom today.

Personal experience. Growing up in elementary school, I always had a positive experience with literacy. My teachers would read to me every day and I remember going home to tell my parents everything that I learned. In kindergarten, I remember loving all books because they took me to new places. Without knowing it, my teacher was using picture books to teach me how to infer, summarize, and comprehend. She was teaching me through examples of writing.

As I progressed throughout elementary school, I continued to love reading and I also found a passion for writing. I wanted to write books and poems based on the books and poems my teachers introduced to me. I was learning new information every day through mentor texts. They were impactful on me as a writer. Writing was fun. I felt brave enough to try new things because I had examples on which to fall back. I remember falling in love with rhyming poems and using *A Light In The Attic* (Silverstein, 1985) over and over again as an example. At the time, I had not realized that this book was used as a mentor text for me.

Then I went to middle school and the layout of my literacy classes changed. I was now completing worksheets on books that I read. In addition, I was filling out grammar worksheets. I had to circle who the subject was, underline the verb, and work through writing in isolation. I became afraid to write because I was afraid to make mistakes. The worksheets I was asked to complete destroyed writing for me. I lost my passion for writing as fast as my passion had been ignited.

My passion for reading and writing continued to dwindle as I progressed throughout middle school and high school. When I started high school, the only writing I was completing were essays on topics that my teacher picked for me. The topics my teachers asked me to write about were dry. More importantly, my teachers did not provide us with examples. I found myself having a lack of confidence when I wrote because mentor texts were not provided to me. I remember feeling stressed and overwhelmed every time I tried to write a paper. I was longing for mentor texts to support my writing.

When I reached my senior year memoir class, things changed. In this class, my teacher used books as examples to show us memoirs. We looked at sample after sample, chapter after chapter, establishing how to create a detailed memoir, and we looked closely at what writing skills the authors used. My teacher reignited my passion for writing. I left that class feeling empowered as a writer, simply because she introduced me to memoirs. These memoirs were mentor texts and they inspired me.

When I started my undergraduate education program at Bemidji State University, I fell in love with the way literacy should be taught. Mentor texts were briefly introduced in my time there, but it was not until I started my graduate degree at Hamline University in 2018 that my passion for using mentor texts in the classroom was brought to life. I was fortunate to attend the Hamline Summer Literacy Institute. I was able to listen to Colby Sharp and Cornelius Minor talk about literacy in their classrooms. I realized then what I should have realized all along; my elementary school teachers were using mentor texts to teach me. In addition to helping teach me the skills I needed to know, it also helped engage me. It gave me a passion for reading and writing. That's when my burning question developed: *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* My capstone project was formed.

Professional experience. As an elementary school teacher, I have been using the idea of mentor texts to enhance learning over the past five years. I have played with the idea of designing units around Chris Van Allsburg, teaching my students how to infer, visualize, and summarize. I have used authors such as Betsy Byars, Jane Yolen, and Faith

Ringgold to teach sensory details in writing. I have used non-fiction books to show and demonstrate non-fiction book elements such as table of contents, glossaries, and captions.

When I use mentor texts in my classroom, I notice the students are grasping the concepts. They are using elements of the mentor texts in their own writing. I also notice they are better able to understand the specific reading skills and are able to apply it to their own texts when they read. In addition, mentor texts have my students sitting on the edge of their seats. They are begging me to read more. In my first year teaching, I noticed I had many reluctant writers. They refused to put anything on paper. As the *Being A Writer* (Regan, Alldredge, & Binkley, 2014) curriculum advanced throughout the year, we used mentor texts to teach writing. My students were referring to books such as *Sylvester and The Magic Pebble* (Steig, 1969) multiple times throughout the year. I noticed a switch and my reluctant writers were now writing. They were creating stories about magic objects too, just like in *Sylvester and The Magic Pebble* (Steig, 1969). It was a powerful realization as a first year teacher. Mentor texts appeared to have worked.

This year, I have a student who is dyslexic. I noticed very early on this student was highly engaged through mentor text lessons. These mentor texts have pushed him to see himself as a reader and a writer. This student has started using sensory details in his writing. He has started using reading skills on his own. These moments are what make mentor texts so valuable.

In general, I notice my English Language Learners, my struggling readers, and my students that are disengaged with literacy lessons are the hardest to reach when it comes to reading and writing. When mentor texts are used, it appears students' struggles

disappear. Students become confident as they read and as they write. After finding a passion for mentor texts, my interest in these readers sparked even more. I want mentor texts to be the reason my students love literacy. I want to use them to create a passion for literacy with all my students in my classroom.

Conclusion

In this section, you have read about my question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* In addition, you have discovered my desire to complete this project and the context to why it is important to me. You have followed me through a journey as a student, a graduate student, and a teacher. Finally, you have realized the importance of this project. This project is important because I want my students to be passionate about writing and successful at it too. In Chapter Two of this project, I will summarize what a mentor text is in more detail and who the experts are in the field. I will explain how to select mentor texts and how mentor texts are connected through reading and writing instruction. I will also explain how mentor texts affect student engagement. Chapter Two will also talk about how mentor texts affect student achievement in literacy. In addition, I will demonstrate who will benefit from my project on mentor texts and the research behind my chosen project. Finally, I will explain the research behind my selected capstone project. In Chapter Three, I will describe my project in full detail. My project is a professional development that will last three sessions. Each session is outlined and explained. Finally, Chapter Four will be my final reflection on this project. You will discover the things I learned throughout the capstone project. Additionally, you will discover what my next steps could be.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Utilizing mentor texts in literacy instruction is an essential component in elementary classrooms. In Chapter One, I talked about the importance of the role that mentor texts played in my own literacy journey. I also acknowledged the role mentor texts currently play in my classroom instruction. In Chapter Two, I will address the research behind mentor texts. This specific research will help me address my capstone project question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* It is important to note that mentor texts have been around for many years in education. They are a huge component of various writing strategies and curriculums. In order to specifically address my capstone question, the research has been broken into five themes.

After thorough research on the topic of mentor texts, I discovered overarching themes. The five themes discovered in the research are included in Chapter Two. The first theme addressed will be the definition of mentor texts and the experts on the subject. The next theme addressed will include how mentor texts should be selected. The third theme addressed is the role mentor texts play in elementary literacy instruction. The final two themes addressed include the important role mentor texts play on student engagement and the role mentor texts play on student achievement. These overarching themes are important because they help conclude that utilizing mentor texts in elementary

literacy instruction is valuable to student achievement. The themes break the research apart to understand how utilizing mentor texts can be done successfully.

At the end of Chapter Two, I will address the research behind effective professional development that will be used to develop my capstone project. I will then give the rationale for my research and how that research relates to the question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* I will also review the overarching themes discussed. Finally, I will introduce you to Chapter Three and Four. In this first section, I will define mentor texts, as well as introduce the experts in this field of research.

Definition of Mentor Texts and the Experts in the Field

In this section, mentor texts will be defined through various resources and citations. In addition, mentor texts will be explained through an in depth look at the literature related to mentor texts. Finally, the experts in the field will be mentioned to show the expertise behind the use of mentor texts in literacy education.

Definition. Over the years, mentor texts have been referred to as touchstone texts, mentor texts, and books used as mentors. All of these terms are used to describe works of literature used to teach reading and writing skills. According to Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), “Mentor texts are pieces of literature that we can return to again and again as we help our young writers learn how to do what they may not yet be able to do on their own” (p. 2). Essentially, mentor texts are used to scaffold literacy instruction over time. They take a topic that is difficult for a writer to understand and allow for risk-taking without the fear of failure. Mentor texts create a bridge for students that connects them to

professional writers and the process that professional writers use to write (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015).

Mentor texts are not just books that are read one time through. Mentor texts are accessed frequently to show author craft and the writing process (Laminack, 2017). In addition to published titles, mentor texts may also include works of writing created by the teacher. In fact, mentor texts become even more valuable when the teacher themselves model the writing process. It is essential that the teacher uses mentor texts to guide the students to recognize what the authors are doing. In addition, the teacher must know the books at an in-depth level to even consider it a mentor text (Laminack, 2017).

Another important part of understanding mentor texts is that they allow the teacher an opportunity to access many different resources. It provides an opportunity to reach every single writer in the room. "Mentor texts enable a teacher, whose planning time and knowledge of every potential genre of writing is limited, to reach every writer in the room, on any given day, whatever the writers' needs" (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015, p. 3). Mentor texts are a tool used for instruction and differentiation. They provide the students scaffolds to be successful authors in the school.

Finally, it is important to understand that not every picture book or book is a mentor text. Mentor texts need to be loved, well known, and accessed many times to be considered a mentor text. A book has to be known well enough to use it as a mentor and it has to have repeated visits over time (Laminack, 2017). In addition, mentor texts are more than just handing students a text. It is a scaffolded process used to teach students

how to read like a writer. This in turn teaches them how to write (Gallagher, 2014). The definition of mentor texts is summarized by the experts in the field.

Experts. Because mentor texts have been used in education for a while, there are many experts on this topic. These experts in the field include Lynne Dorfman and Rose Cappelli (2007), Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell (2015), and Lester Laminack (2007). These experts stand out when proving why mentor texts should be utilized in elementary classrooms.

These five experts believe that the use of mentor texts allows students to see through an author's lens. Their research proves that utilizing mentor texts leads to student success. Although some other professional educators and researchers believe using mentor texts teaches students to copy or plagiarize, if mentor texts are used correctly, they guide students into their own craft and ideas (Corden, 2007). These other viewpoints believe that writing should be taught in isolation, meaning that students should not be given examples. In addition, the other side believes it takes away from students' own craft and creativity when it comes to writing (Graham & Harris, 2016). The experts on mentor texts, however, feel strongly that it provides students with the opportunity to take risks and feel successful.

Similarly, when a student is learning how to draw, we don't just give them a paper and pencil and say, "draw". Instead we provide them with a step by step process to draw. This is how mentor texts are used. We break apart books to teach students a step by step way to write. Every child receives the same lesson, yet every child has a different outcome and final product of writing. According to Dorfman and Cappelli (2007),

“Mentor texts help writers notice things about an author’s work that is not like anything they might have done before, and empower them to try something new” (p. 3). Mentor texts are not used to copy, but rather they are used as prestigious examples to our young writers. Mentor texts are used as models to inspire students’ own exceptional writing. The experts believe that not only is there a specific way to go about selecting mentor texts, but that the selection of mentor texts must be done purposefully and carefully.

Summary of defining mentor texts. In this last section mentor texts were defined as books or literature that can be used to teach specific literacy skills. These mentor texts should be used multiple times. The experts that define mentor texts believe they are an important part of writing instruction. In this next section, how to select mentor texts will be addressed.

Selection of Mentor Texts

There are many elements to consider when choosing mentor texts for elementary classrooms. In this section, mentor texts will be discussed as works of literature that offer endless opportunities to their readers (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007). The process of selecting mentor texts will be addressed. In addition the process of finding a quality mentor text will be analyzed.

Selection. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, not all books and literature can be considered mentor texts. The most important thing to consider when selecting mentor texts is finding texts that the teacher is familiar with and texts that the students love. According to Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), “Mentor texts are as comfortable as a

worn pair of blue jeans” (p. 3). This means that the teacher needs to know the ins and outs of every mentor text that is being used.

When a teacher selects a book to be considered a mentor text, that is only the first step. According to Sturgell (2008), mentor texts need to be talked about frequently as readers before they can be used to mentor writers. In addition, Sturgell (2008) states that mentor texts must have many things to teach within them. They also should have the ability to be talked about for a long period of time. If a teacher only wants to use the book for one specific point, it is not a high quality mentor text. Finally, Sturgell (2008) states that when selecting quality mentor texts, “The text is a little more sophisticated than the writing of your best students” (p. 411). The text should be challenging but still accessible to students. This pushes all students in the classroom to take risks, while still allowing for access to the text for students at all ability levels.

A book can be considered a quality mentor text when students are exposed to the text numerous times. It is important to note that simply creating a shelf titled *Mentor Texts* does not allow the teacher or students to know the books at an in depth level (Laminack, 2017). In addition, a label does not make a book useful. A shelf with a label, is actually the exact opposite outcome that mentor texts should have in the classroom. Instead of pulling books to fill shelves, we should start small. Starting with a few books that are mentor texts is key.

Cynthia Dollins (2016) talks about the process of selecting mentor texts. She states that teachers should allow students to hear the book on a level of enjoyment first. This means the teacher should read the book in its entirety. Then teachers should reread

the book and start an open discussion about the author's crafts. The teacher should take notes. These notes should be in a place that the students in the room can access frequently. Dollins (2016) also notes that the books should be revisited many times and they should be accessible to all students, regardless of their reading level. These components addressed by Dollins (2016) are why mentor texts are typically picture books. Picture books allow accessibility to a wide range of readers.

In summary, mentor texts should be used many times for similar or different purposes. They should be known at a deeper level than just an average book. Additionally, mentor texts need to provide students opportunities to learn new skills. They also need to be books that the students and the teacher can enjoy and can love.

Selecting picture books. As stated above, most mentor texts are picture books. There are many factors to consider when selecting picture books. Student interest is one factor that should be highly considered. Students will relate to mentor texts better if they are engaged and interested in what the author wrote. In fact, research done by Gericke and Salmon (2014) on the impact mentor texts have on male students and their writing, shows that when the mentor texts are highly engaging, students are more successful. They found that male students were able to write more comfortably. In addition, the male students showed better expression of their feelings. Finally, the picture books selected appeared to disguise the process of writing to the students that participated in the study.

Scaffolding. Furthermore, picture books should be selected based on their ability to be scaffolded. Scaffolding is similar to a gradual release model of teaching. According to Gambrell, Malloy, Marinak, and Mazzone (2015), "In general, the gradual-release

model describes a process in which students gradually assume a greater degree of responsibility and independence for a targeted learning outcome” (p. 17). This means that the teacher can use the picture book to guide and then gradually pull away as the students work independently. The picture books should be considered strong examples of very specific writing skills and authors' craft. Picture books that are chosen as mentor texts should contain many different elements of writing including, circular text structures, strong use of figurative language, strong use of descriptive language, or any other text feature that the readers will find valuable (MacKay, Ricks, & Young, 2017).

Diversity. Finally, picture books should be selected based on the diversity they provide. Diverse picture books are books that provide, “themes centered on race, ethnicity, culture, and languages” (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015, p. 379). Diversity is the practice in which we include all perspectives in our classroom. Mentor texts should create windows and mirrors for our students as writers. They should be able to see themselves in the texts that are being read to them. They should be able to create stories about their own life and experiences because they should be able to relate to the mentor texts being used in the classroom. According to Chimamanda Ngozi (2009), a storyteller that grew up in eastern Nigeria, when she started writing “I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading”. Her stories included predominantly white characters that grew up with snow. She was writing stories similar to the books she was reading, instead of using her life stories to create her own books. This is why mentor texts should be diverse, so all our readers can be exposed to stories about themselves.

Addressing author's purpose. It is important to note that authors do not write picture books with the thought process of creating books that will be used as mentor texts. They write the books to entertain or inform or persuade the readers. The author's purpose needs to be addressed with the learners. When selecting mentor texts, teachers must use them with readers first. They must provide opportunities for their students to enjoy them and explore them as curious readers (Laminack, 2011). It is only after they have done this, that students can make the connection between reading the text and using it as a mentor text thoughtfully in their writing instruction. Understanding the author's purpose is critical when selecting which mentor texts should be used in classrooms.

Teachers as mentors. In addition to using high quality and thoughtfully selected picture books, teachers can also use their own writing. According to Gallagher (2014), not all mentor texts need to be published writing. In addition to using published writing in the classroom, teachers should be modeling the writing process with their students. Exposing students to the real process of writing, through the eyes of the teacher, teaches them foundational writing skills that they are unable to learn without the teacher as their mentor. Teachers should be frequently showing their writing. This shows students the writing process in real time. It allows them to use the teacher as their mentor and allows them to utilize the mentor text throughout the entire writing process. As the teacher models each step, it scaffolds the writing process for the students to try. Even though the teacher may make mistakes in the process, it is still considered a quality mentor text.

Quality of mentor texts. Finally, the second part of this section will address the quality of mentor texts. Mentor texts should be high quality focusing on specific writing

crafts (Dollins, 2016). Not every picture book lends itself to being a high quality mentor text. There are many things to be considered. As stated earlier, mentor texts must be books that are well loved by the teacher and the class. In addition, the mentor text is one that the students can connect to, similar to the male students that were addressed earlier in this section. A high quality mentor text is one that draws the reader in, whether that is about the subject, topic, or pictures (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007). High quality mentor texts must also address multiple examples of an author's craft.

There are many questions that should be considered when selecting a high quality mentor text. Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) ask:

Is this a book that your students could relate to and/or read along or with a partner? Does it provide examples of the kind of writing you want from your students? Can it be revisited often for multiple purposes, providing opportunities for lessons across the traits of writing? (p. 4)

Teachers should ask themselves these three crucial questions when considering using a mentor text with writers in the classroom

Summary of selecting mentor texts. In this section, a quality mentor text was defined as a book that the students and teachers love. The teacher should consider the writing process, the students, and the outcomes they expect after using the mentor text in the classroom. The following section will address the important role that mentor texts play in literacy instruction. It also addresses how to utilize mentor texts in elementary classrooms.

Role of Mentor Texts in Elementary Literacy Instruction

Mentor texts play a huge role in literacy instruction. In this section, mentor texts will be addressed as a connection between two components of literacy. The literacy skills are reading and writing. According to Marchetti and O'Dell (2015), "As we introduce our students to mentor texts, we connect their personal histories and interests with their experience as readers. And then we drive this connection forward into their writing lives" (p. 84). This section will focus on how reading and writing skills weave together with the use of mentor texts at the heart of the connection. In addition, this section will look at how mentor texts create a connection between the love of reading and the love of writing (Mackay et al., 2017). In order to better understand the connection between reading and writing, reading and writing instruction will be addressed separately.

Reading instruction. Reading instruction is composed of many different components that create learning opportunities for students. A mentor text will not be successful in a writing community unless the student can first be a reader with the text. As children are learning how to write, they are learning to write by being readers and by reading (Crawford, Sobolak, & Foster, 2017). Reading allows students to be exposed to books that use specific types of writing. Although these books may not be talked about through a writer's lens, students are still analyzing the text as they read. This provides them with the important skill of understanding many types of genres and texts. It also allows students to closely examine writing to develop a love for the text and an understanding of how they will use it in their own writing (Dollins, 2016).

Another learning opportunity is using mentor texts to teach reading skills.

Although mentor texts refer to the sources used to teach specific writing skills, mentor texts can also be sources to teach students specific reading skills. For example, a teacher may use repeated readings of a text to understand how to visualize while reading. The reader may practice with the text and deeply understand the author's craft, before fully being able to apply visualizing to their own book. The book used by the teacher was a model for the student. The student had multiple exposures to the book over a long period of time while focusing on a specific author's craft. Therefore, books for reading can become mentor texts if the teacher selects the texts appropriately. In addition to teaching students how to read with mentor texts, teachers can use reading instruction to enhance their writing instruction. This is through the process of close reading.

Close Reading. Close reading is a process in which the student reads a text multiple times (Gambrell et al., 2015). “Comprehension and close reading are clearly aligned in that close reading requires the student to uncover layers of meaning that lead to and support deep comprehension of text” (Gambrell et al., 2015, p. 19). This process allows for books to be analyzed. In addition, it provides an opportunity for the reader to break the book down. Close reading requires the reader to engage with the text multiple times in order to analyze and understand it. This is because mentor texts require multiple exposures to one specific book (Dollins, 2016). Mentor texts also require repeated readings of the text.

In addition to reading the book multiple times, mentor texts must be analyzed by looking closely at the author's craft. Dollins (2016) suggests, “Part of the close reading

process asks students to pay close attention to the specific craft and structure the author has used in the text” (p. 49). Analyzing the author’s craft is a specific skill used when incorporating mentor texts in writing instruction. The teacher must assist students in the close reading process. This will help students make the connection between reading and writing. In addition, listening to literature provides opportunities for students to think and read like writers, instead of think and read like readers (Bromley, 2015). This helps connect reading and writing. In conclusion, close reading supports the use of mentor texts in writing instruction.

Writing instruction. While close reading sets the reader up to be successful with mentor texts in writing instruction, mentor texts play another role to writers. Mentor texts are used to model specific writing skills in all areas of writing. A large part of utilizing mentor texts in the elementary classroom is to incorporate books published by professional authors and discuss these texts multiple times. While this is a great example of writing instruction, this is not the only part of writing instruction that incorporates mentor texts. An important reason to utilize writing instruction is to allow students “the right to see others write” (Spandel, 2005, p. 78).

Teachers as mentors. In order for students to get the best writing instruction, they need to see their teachers write. They need to see their teachers participate in every part of the writing process. Spandel (2005) suggests that the students need to see the teacher selecting a topic to write about. She states, “The secret to good modeling is to notice the tiny things we do as writers and to share them with our students” (Spandel, 2005, p. 89). This can be done through modeling on the board. The teacher should allow the students

to give them topics, then the teacher will select the topic that appeals to them most and explain why they selected it. Modeling a process such as selecting a topic is important because students need to learn that skill through examples.

In addition to modeling topic selection, teachers should model writing in real time. Students should be able to watch their teacher write. This is a valuable experience to young writers. After the teacher writes for a short period of time, the writing community can have a discussion on what they noticed. This will help the students make connections with their own writing process. Furthermore, it allows the students to see mistakes and provides an environment for risk taking. When teachers write in front of their students, the teacher joins the students as a member of the classroom writing community (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007).

When teachers write in front of their students, they are modeling how to be a writer. “Good modeling is about strategies and behaviors” (Spandel, 2005, p. 81). Even though teachers lack perfect writing pieces, they model topic selection, thinking while writing, rereading their writing, and coming up with the next steps as writers (Spandel, 2005). These are all steps that need to be mastered in the writing process. When teachers model these steps, students have a guide to reference. The teachers are providing guidance and scaffolding as students work to master the writing process (Crawford & Foster, 2017).

Finally, it is important for teachers to be a model during the writing process because it helps teachers teach. In an example given by Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), it is nearly impossible to teach a person how to swim without learning to swim yourself.

They reiterate that the same goes for writing. It is hard to teach writing without going through the process of writing yourself. Teachers need to experience the entire writing experience to reach their students' goals in writing.

Reading and writing instruction. As shown above, reading instruction and writing instruction tie closely together. A student needs to understand reading in order to understand writing. Additionally, a student needs to be able to analyze literature, understand the author's purpose, and read a text multiple times to use that text successfully as a writer. According to Katie Ray (2012), one way to get students to listen like writers is through the practice of read alouds. Teachers can intentionally choose literature for read alouds that naturally lend themselves towards recognizing authors' crafts. In addition, teachers can thoughtfully create discussions about the lens of the author during their read alouds. Reading and writing instruction together is an important part of utilizing mentor texts in literacy instruction.

Utilizing mentor texts to teach literacy. There are many specific ways that mentor texts can be utilized in an elementary classroom. Mentor texts can be used during mini-lessons to teach specific author's crafts. These mini lessons focus on specific writing skills. In addition, mentor texts can be utilized for teaching specific genres. Finally, mentor texts can be utilized to teach science and social studies.

Mini-lessons. Incorporating mentor texts into curriculums can be done through mini-lessons. These mini-lessons should be designed around the relationship that the student develops with the book (Laminack, 2017). This means that the lesson should create a love for the book, as well as a love for the author's craft and way of writing.

When designing a mini-lesson, teachers need to go beyond just selecting a mentor text to use. They need to find ways students can relate to that mentor text and use the examples in their own writing. The lessons should be designed around opportunities that open doors for young writers (MacKay et al., 2017). Even if the writer is unable to apply the specific skill from the mini-lesson that day, the writer should be able to refer back to that skill on a different day (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007).

When designing mini-lessons, a teacher may focus on a specific skill in writing. An example of this may be word choice. The teacher will carefully select a text that lends itself towards word choice. The teacher will then read the book for enjoyment. As the mini-lesson progresses, the teacher will create an environment to view the book through the authors lens, critically looking at why the author selected the words they did. After, the teacher will encourage the students to think about the words they write. As the students are writing, the teacher will be conferencing with students individually, referring back to the mentor text or texts as needed (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015). Finally, teachers should redesign their mini-lessons and mentor text usage based on the knowledge they gained with the individual conferences.

Genres. Another way to utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction is through teaching specific genres. These genres include persuasive writing, poetry, non-fiction writing, and fiction writing. Brandi Clark (2014) states, “Writing inspiration often comes from reading great books” (p. 74). Reading books of many genres inspires students to write. Additionally, mentor texts teach the characteristics and elements of these genres. Students are able to listen to the text, interact with the text, and then create

their own stories. According to Graham and Harris (2016), “One way to help children acquire such knowledge is to teach students about the basic building blocks in specific types of writing” (p. 363). When students see an author using elements of a specific genre, they are more likely to use those elements in their own writing.

Science and social studies. In addition to teaching reading and writing, mentor texts can also be used to teach science and social studies. Similar to using mentor texts for literacy instruction, mentor texts can guide and scaffold students when writing informational reports and feature articles in other content areas. The key component when using mentor texts in science and social studies instruction is to focus on the structure of the mentor texts. “Helping students understand the structure of a text helps them see how the author introduces the topic and presents information to the reader” (Pytash & Morgan, 2014, p. 98). Once they are able to see the structure, students can analyze the writing. This helps them learn how to write informational reports and feature articles. It gives them opportunities to try new things in science and social studies writing. Overall, the goal of using mentor texts in other subject areas is to show students that their writing should be different based on the content they are writing (Pytash & Morgan, 2014).

Summary of utilizing mentor texts. This section addressed the role that mentor texts play in reading instruction, writing instruction, and how they connect together. Mentor texts are essential when teaching both reading and writing, as well as teaching other subject areas. Utilizing mentor texts can be done through mini-lessons. The role

mentor texts play in teaching reading and writing instruction has a significant impact on student engagement within the classroom. This will be discussed in the next section.

Student Engagement

When mentor texts are selected correctly and utilized appropriately in elementary classrooms, there is a significant improvement in student engagement. Brandi Clark (2014) states, “Make it real! Make it fun! Engagement starts with the right book” (p. 74). Mentor texts are engaging when teachers and students select the right book. In this section, studies will show the increase in student engagement based on the use of mentor texts. Additionally, this section will talk about the choice mentor texts provide, the impact mentor texts have on reaching all students, and the love of literacy that mentor texts instills.

Research has been done on the use of mentor texts in the classroom. That research shows an increase in student engagement during reading and writing lessons. When books are accessible to all students, students are more willing and eager to share their ideas and connections (Moser, 2017). This observation directly shows that mentor texts increase student engagement throughout literacy lessons and even more specifically in writing. In addition, the study done by Gericke and Salmon (2017) found that mentor texts inspired male student writers to write because using mentor texts disguised the act of writing. Therefore, the students were engaged and were writing for fun, while also learning about the craft of writing. The study proved to be successful.

Another study done by Moses, Serafini, and Loyd (2016) on the use of informational texts with kindergarten students found that using a mentor text provides

students with an invitation to become authors on their own. The book provided opportunities for the students to create their own books because it gave them a model to follow. Additionally, the study found that students had a personal connection with the mentor text. When personal connections are made, students become more engaged with the lesson, the mentor text, and their own writing.

In a third study done on the impact of explicit instruction on narrative writing (Corden, 2007), it was found that there is a benefit to students seeing mentor texts. In addition, Corden (2007) states, “We found that children benefit from experiencing what it is like to be an author - wrestling with problems, drawing on knowledge and experiences, seeking advice, and responding to critical comments” (p. 286). When students have the opportunity to think like authors, it creates ownership. This ownership in the writing process increases their engagement. Students are being treated like professional authors in this process which means they are more likely to be engaged. Additionally, students are working closely with texts they love and then they are picking out what they enjoyed from the mentor texts to incorporate in their own writing.

Choice. Providing choice in the classroom increases student engagement in literacy tasks (Gambrell, 2011). When teachers use mentor texts in the classroom, they provide choice for the students in a couple of ways. The first way is that the teacher can allow students to choose the books they love to be used as mentors. Mentor texts can and should be books that students recommend (Marchetti & O’Dell, 2015). When students are using books they love, they are automatically engaged in the lesson. Additionally, they already have some understanding of the author’s craft because they read the text as a

reader first. The texts that they choose also have an impact on their voices as writers (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015).

The second way mentor texts provide choice is through the topics students choose to write. Mentor texts are used to model how students can create their own writing. In addition, they allow students to evaluate what they want to write. Mentor texts do not force students to pick a topic. Students are able to choose what they want to write about within the guidelines given by the teacher. Providing students with the choice to choose their topic, increases their engagement.

Reaches all students. In addition to providing student choice, mentor texts connect to all students. When mentor texts are used in the elementary classroom, all students, no matter the ability, are able to access the lesson. The mentor texts provide scaffolded opportunities. The teacher leads the discussion to point out particular examples from the author. Then the students can use what they learned to write on their own, with the support of the teacher if needed. Additionally, the teacher can read the book to the students, thereby helping struggling readers. Mentor texts provide practice of literacy skills without the risk of failure. This builds student confidence. According to Gambrell (2011), “The most motivating reading tasks and activities are moderately challenging, requiring the student to put forth some effort-but with effort comes some level of success” (p. 176). Using mentor texts in the classroom provides a moderately challenging lesson that comes with success making mentor texts extremely engaging to all students.

Another part of reaching all students is that using diverse mentor texts in the classroom provides opportunities for students to see themselves and to see others. Lessons are engaging when students can relate to the books that they are reading. It allows them to relate to the books that are used to mentor and guide them.

Summary. In this section, mentor texts were seen as a motivating factor for students when writing. They provide opportunities for all students to access the text. In addition, using mentor texts provides choice in the classroom. Choice is a highly engaging factor for learning. Finally, mentor texts reach all students by providing diverse opportunities. Mentor texts are highly engaging. In this next section, the impact of mentor texts and student achievement will be discussed.

Student Achievement

This section will address the importance of mentor texts on students' academic work and achievement within the classroom. Mentor texts provide an opportunity for students to take risks. They also allow students to focus on specific author crafts such as text structure, word choice, and non-fiction text elements. In addition, mentor texts teach students to read with an author's lens, showing them the thought processes behind authors' decisions (Gainer, 2013). Once students are able to read with an author's lens, they are able to borrow thoughtful ideas from mentor texts and use them in their own writing. Mentor texts also provide important learning opportunities in a writers workshop setting. According to Kerr (2017), "As writing students develop the habit of turning to mentor texts for inspiration and reflection on craft elements, learning to write with a mentor text approach enables independence, creativity, confidence, and individuality" (p.

229). Mentor texts provide the guided scaffolds to create successful writers in the classroom.

When students use mentor texts in the classroom, their confidence grows. Before a student can write quality pieces, they have to be able to see quality writing that has been done (Gallagher, 2014). The mentor texts serve as models to the students. This is similar to many things students learn in life; when a model is presented, students are more successful. Their confidence is built when they understand how something works. Introducing mentor texts in the classroom first allows students to see a high quality example of a story with the guidance of the teacher. Then students are able to use what they learned in a simplified way to apply the strategy to their own literacy skills, reading or writing (Moser, 2017). This is how using mentor texts builds students' confidence. After their confidence is built, students are more successful and show greater academic achievement (Gallagher, 2014; Moser, 2017).

In addition to building confidence, utilizing mentor texts in the classroom improves academic achievement because it allows for risk taking. When using mentor texts in the classroom, all students are able to access the text. This means that, "Mentor texts are a window into complex writing for struggling students" (Moser, 2017, p. 371). Typically in a classroom, struggling writers either sit without writing or produce confusing stories that are hard to follow. When a teacher introduces mentor texts, students are able to see an example. That example is used as inspiration for the writer to write (Clark, 2014). The mentor texts spark student interest and engage them in writing. They allow students to take risks with models right by their side. Students have the

mentor texts to fall back on for support throughout the entire writing process. Mentor texts take away the unknown of writing for each student. It gives them writing practice with a mentor by their side.

While risk taking is an important part in writing growth and the impact on student achievement, mentor texts also improve individual writing skills. When mentor texts are used in the classroom, they can model anything throughout the writing process. For example, mentor texts can be used to model word choice in the drafting process. They could also be used to model punctuation and grammar, or they can be used to model specific elements of genres. The models are able to show writers solid examples of how writing should look. Students can use these texts to learn at all levels of the writing process (Crawford et al., 2017).

Finally, mentor texts push students to grow in their own writing. Sturgell (2008) states that when students started looking at multiple mentor texts, students were able to make comparisons across the texts and notice similarities. These connections push students to see different aspects in the writing structure and help advance their thinking. Additionally, Sturgell (2008) states that even if the same mentor texts were used each year, students were able to learn new things about the mentor texts. This is because they continually are growing as writers.

Research. Studies have shown how utilizing mentor texts improve student academic achievement. In the study done by Gericke and Salmon (2013) they found that the male students were more likely to show emotion in their writing. In addition, students were more likely to try new words when they wrote and took risks while writing. This

was because their teachers used engaging mentor texts that the students could relate to while learning about the writing process. All of these outcomes from the study lead to academic achievement.

In another study done by Ray Corden (2007), he found that when teachers were the models for students, students gained a better understanding of how texts are constructed. This also impacts academic achievement because students are able to apply this knowledge to their own writing. Students are able to be more successful writers. Additionally, having teachers as mentors shows students how to be reflective as learners.

Finally, in a study done by Moses et al. (2016), they found that when kindergarten teachers used a mentor text with their students, “the multimodal aspects of the selected mentor text made the writing process accessible to pre-conventional writers” (p. 538). In other words, it gave the students opportunities to become writers. Without this opportunity, students would not have access to writing the way they did after the mentor text was used. Students joined a community of authors (Moses et al., 2016).

As shown by the studies done and addressed above, the use of mentor texts has a successful impact on student achievement. All of the studies show that students benefit academically when mentor texts are used. Additionally, the studies published show that students are more likely to be successful as writers when their teachers use mentor texts or are models for students during the writing process. Overall, students are more likely to be successful as writers when mentor texts are used.

Summary. In this section, mentor texts were analyzed for having an impact on student academic achievement in the elementary classroom. Additionally, mentor texts

have shown to support creativity, scaffolding, and risk-taking to enhance student learning and growth. Mentor texts also provide the opportunity for learning in all aspects of the writing process. In my next chapter I will discuss how this research will be used in professional development. In order to do this, professional development needs to be explained. The next section will address the research behind effective professional development for adult learners.

Creating a Professional Development

Based on the research done on utilizing mentor texts in elementary literacy classrooms, a professional development will be created. In this section the project portion of my capstone will be addressed. In order to successfully create a professional development session, research on effective professional development will be summarized below.

Effective Professional Development. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) effective professional development is “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). In order to organize an effective professional development, the presenter must take into consideration the teachers that are being targeted, the best practices being addressed, and the final student learning outcomes. Additionally, the professional development will be effective if it includes handouts, learning activities that the teacher can use, and time for reflection too (Shearer, Carr, & Vogt, 2019).

The first thing to consider when creating a professional development is how members in the audience should be placed for interaction (Knowles, 1992). The presenter

may want the teachers sitting in groups based on grade level or groups that involve interaction with a wide variety of perspectives. There are additional ways that the presenter may consider too.

Another thing to consider when designing an effective professional development is the time-frame for the professional development. Professional development should be broken apart into a few sessions because professional developments that are long lose teacher engagement. This is best practice according to Morgan and Bates (2018). “In some models of professional development, especially those characterized as one-shot learning, there is often no time for feedback or reflection” (Morgan & Bates, 2018, p. 625). This is why it is important to allow for multiple days of professional development to allow the teachers time to implement, reflect, and discuss the practices being addressed in the presentations.

In addition, an effective professional development will address the learning outcomes for the teachers and the students. According to Shearer et al. (2019) a good professional development allows teachers to know how this will apply to their students. In addition Shearer et al. (2019) states, “Teachers want to learn that which they can apply immediately in their own classrooms with their own students” (p. 283). An effective professional development is clear and provides learning outcomes that the audience can apply directly to their classrooms. This is why it is important that the professional learning that is done is “relevant to our own students in our own classrooms” (Shearer et al., 2019, p. 283).

When it comes to effective professional development teachers should participate in active learning (Morgan & Bates, 2018). Active learning is when we provide opportunities for the teachers to engage in professional development. “These experiences could include examining student artifacts, using materials that teachers then implement in their classrooms, engaging in lessons that teachers could use with students, and utilizing mentor texts, teachers will participate in active learning” (Morgan & Bates, 2018). Effective strategies should be modeled and then the presenter should provide opportunities for the teachers to use the strategies to teach. They should also allow the teachers to try the strategies authentically. This active learning also focuses on collaboration. “Collaboration engenders shared knowledge and expertise” (Shearer et al., 2019, p. 285). Opportunities should be provided for teachers to collaborate.

Finally, effective professional development should provide many opportunities for engagement. “Teachers benefit from seeing instructional practices in action, whether via video, demonstration lessons, peer observations, or case studies of teaching” (Morgan & Bates, 2018, p. 624). Professional development should include a wide variety of these opportunities.

Summary. In conclusion, effective professional development should be done over a duration of time. It should provide opportunities for after learning and it should provide opportunities for reflection and feedback. Additionally, effective professional development should include the reason behind the opportunity for learning and how it will affect the student outcomes. The next section will address the rationale for the research and how it relates to utilizing mentor texts in the elementary classroom.

Connections and Rationale

In this section you will find out how my research specifically relates to my capstone question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* Additionally, I will address the gaps in the current knowledge. As I researched my topic I realized there are many ways to utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction and that there are important factors that need to be addressed in order to properly utilize mentor texts.

First and foremost, I realized that when picking a mentor text, I need to be intentional about my purpose for the mentor text. This means that I need to have a specific focus. The mentor text also needs to have the ability to be used for many purposes. In addition, the mentor text needs to be a book that I love or that my students love. If I am unable to understand every inch of the mentor text, it loses its ability to be utilized appropriately in the classroom.

Furthermore, I realized that in order for mentor texts to be properly utilized, they must be used over and over again. Mentor texts provide opportunities for modeling and scaffolding only after the students have the opportunity to be exposed to them many times. Mentor texts will be utilized properly in my classroom when I find the ones that I can use repeatedly.

Additionally, utilizing mentor texts have a huge impact on reading and writing instruction. Mentor texts should be read closely and understood deeply by readers. Then mentor texts can be utilized in writing instruction. This is how mentor texts should be utilized for literacy instruction.

Finally, I found through my research that the rationale behind utilizing mentor texts in the elementary literacy classroom is that it improves student engagement and academic achievement. The literature review I did shows that students are more likely to take risks when mentor texts are used. Students are also more likely to gain confidence in writing through the use of mentor texts. This shows the impact it has on student achievement and why mentor texts should be utilized in the elementary literacy classrooms.

My capstone project and literature review will be impactful in literacy instruction for two reasons. The first reason is that it addresses the gap in current research that writing instruction should contain rubrics and explicit directions. Using mentor texts allows students to see examples, therefore they are more likely to be engaged, motivated to write, and successful in their writing. Secondly, this will impact literacy instruction because teachers will see the benefits of using mentor texts in literacy instruction and how close reading directly relates to the use of mentor texts in writing. Current research shows the importance of mentor texts, however it misses the opportunity on how to utilize them in all areas of literacy instruction. This research proves the importance of changing writing instruction to allow for mentor texts to be used as examples, instead of only using rubrics.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you read through a literature review. You learned about mentor texts. Additionally, you read about what mentor texts are, why the experts that study mentor texts find them valuable, and how to utilize mentor texts in the elementary

classroom. Furthermore, you read about the impact mentor texts have on student engagement and student achievement. In addition, the research on professional development was addressed. Finally, you read about my rationale for the research and what it means to my capstone question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?*

The focus for Chapter Three will be on how my research will impact professional development and be used to inform teachers. This professional development will be on the importance of mentor texts, how to select mentor texts, and how to utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy education. Chapter Three will be all about my project description, the setting of my project, and how the professional development will be created. It will also include the duration of the professional development and who the professional development will target.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Having a positive literacy experience is something that I always valued as a student and creating a positive literacy experience is something I will continue to value as an educator. In order for a literacy experience to be positive, books need to be looked at as a connection to reading and writing. Additionally, books need to model to students how reading and writing can be done in a fun way. I have discovered throughout my years of reflection on the literacy experiences that I loved as a student that mentor texts were the driving force behind these positive moments. I have also discovered that my students love my literacy lessons when I utilize mentor texts in my classroom. This led me to my capstone project question: *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* Throughout my literature review I have discovered that utilizing mentor texts helps create a positive literacy experience for students. I want to share my research and discovery with fellow educators by creating a purposeful and effective professional development session.

I know from my own personal experience, the importance of a well planned professional development session. As I reflect on professional development sessions I have attended, it was important to pay attention to the elements of the sessions I liked best. Professional development sessions need to be engaging to the staff to have the best results. Additionally, I found myself more drawn to professional development sessions that relate to things I am already doing with my students. This is another reason why I

decided to create three professional development sessions for the staff at my school because mentor texts relate to both our reading and writing curriculum. Based on my own experience of attending professional development sessions, I also wanted to make sure they were engaging, interactive, and well timed.

Throughout Chapter Three, I will address my capstone project and the methods behind my chosen project, a professional development session. In addition, I will address why my project is important. In this chapter, you will also discover the setting of my project, the participants, and the timeline for my professional development. Finally, I will address a summary of the chapter and highlight the information that will be in Chapter Four.

Project Description

After extensive research on mentor texts, I realized that my research would best be delivered over a three day professional development. I selected professional development sessions for my project because I want my fellow teachers to be able to understand and utilize mentor texts in their literacy instruction. Furthermore, the information I discovered while researching will benefit the students in my school. This professional development was spread out over time to allow for teachers to implement their learning in their own classroom. It also allowed time for individual reflection. My professional development sessions targeted kindergarten through fourth grade teachers, the teachers located in my elementary school. The professional development addressed three main topics over the three days. The topics included the definition of mentor texts and why mentor texts are important; how to properly select mentor texts for your

classroom, with examples included; and the final session was on how to properly utilize mentor texts in elementary classrooms. I will further explain these topics and the professional development sessions in the following paragraphs.

Professional development session one. The first professional development session was forty five minutes. The session included Google slides highlighting important information, in addition to my contact information for the staff if they have questions later. The slides were shared out at the end of the session. This session and all further sessions included staff that work together at the same school. Also, it is important to note that I am employed at this school so the staff have a relationship with me. The professional development session included our learning objectives and a short engagement activity to start. This engagement activity involved a picture book that could be used as a mentor text in the future. Then I gave a brief introduction to mentor texts and what they are used for in the classroom. My slides included clear definitions of mentor texts. It also provided clear examples of how mentor texts can be used and shared in the classroom.

Throughout my first professional development session, I provided multiple opportunities for grade level teachers to discuss their thinking and wonderings together. This means that my professional development included grade level teams sitting together. The discussions centered around teachers' beliefs on mentor texts and how they currently use mentor texts in the classroom. As these discussions were built into my presentation, I had time to walk around and target specific grade level questions and discussions.

Finally, at the end of the session, staff were given an infographic sheet on mentor texts and they were asked to reflect over the next month on what books they currently use as mentor texts. It was important in this process because the staff already have mentor texts that they are using, but they may not have looked at them that way before. The infographic sheet was a tool to help the staff identify and remember what mentor texts are and why they are important in their literacy instruction.

Professional development session two. The second professional development session was done a month after the first session. It included the same group of kindergarten through fourth grade teachers and it included the same method of presenting the information, through Google slides. In addition, this session was similar in length to the first, forty-five minutes.

In this session, I addressed the following specific learning objective with the staff: Selecting mentor texts for the elementary classroom. In this presentation, I first provided time to reflect on the question I left them with in the previous session, “What mentor texts do you already use?” Then I brainstormed with the staff, how did we come across these mentor texts or what do we like about them that make them mentor texts for us to use? This was an active conversation with staff members who moved around discussing with each other. Then I included five example mentor texts for each grade level that can also be found in our school library. This was important because I wanted the staff to be able to find these throughout the following month if they wanted to try to use them while teaching. The mentor texts I selected took into consideration the demographics of the school and they also supported the literacy state standards for each grade level.

At the end of this session, I encouraged staff to check these books out for trial in their own classrooms. I left them with that task to do in their own classroom over the following month before the final professional development session. I, again, left them with my contact information if they have further questions throughout the month.

Professional development session three. The final professional development session was done with the same group of teachers that attended the first two sessions. In addition, the same presentation method was used and the same guidelines as above were followed. The session was also forty-five minutes in length.

In this session, I first allowed for reflection and discussion on the mentor texts staff used in their own classroom. I had staff line up based on their experience utilizing the mentor texts, ranging from “It went really well” to “It was a struggle”. Then I addressed the learning objective for the session which is: Successfully utilizing mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction.

For this presentation, I had made videos to show how to successfully utilize mentor texts in the elementary classroom. These videos are based on the example mentor texts I provided in the previous session. Although time did not allow us to watch each grade level video, we did watch one example video and then had a discussion about what we saw. In addition, I provided slides that showed the research behind successfully utilizing mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction.

At the end of this session, I shared the entire presentation with the staff so they have access to their grade level videos. In addition, I provided the staff with a professional template and checklist to use when creating a lesson with mentor texts. I

allowed for any final questions and reminded the staff I am here to support them with the use of mentor texts in their classrooms. Finally, I asked staff to complete a reflection of the professional development sessions. I had staff use three sticky notes. On one sticky note, staff were asked to write one thing they learned that they did not know before these training sessions. On the second sticky note, staff were asked to write down one thing they will utilize in their teaching from these sessions. On the third sticky note, staff were asked to write at least one thing that could have gone better during the professional development sessions. These sticky notes were used for me to reflect on the effectiveness of my project. I wanted to make sure that staff understand the importance of utilizing mentor texts in their classroom and felt comfortable going back to utilize mentor texts in their own classrooms. I also wanted to know how effective my project was. This session wrapped up the three sessions of professional development that helped answer the question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?*

Summary. This section addressed the three days of professional development that I had designed to help answer the question: *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* In the next section, I will address the research and theories behind the professional development sessions that I designed.

Research

The research and theories behind why I chose to run my professional development sessions the way I have was addressed in great detail in Chapter Two. In addition, the research behind my question *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in*

elementary literacy instruction? can also be found throughout my literature review in Chapter Two. In order to better understand my project description, I will also summarize my research surrounding professional development in the following paragraphs.

Professional development theory and research. This professional development was done over three sessions because that is best practice according to Bates and Morgan (2018). As described above in my project description, I started with the learning objectives each day. This is because according to Shearer, Carr, and Vogt (2019) a good professional development allows teachers to know how this will apply to their students (p. 282). I wanted the teachers to be able to know how this will apply to their own students in their own classrooms.

My professional development was also designed around the theory of providing teachers with resources they can utilize in their classrooms. Shearer et al., (2019) state, “Teachers want to learn that which they can apply immediately in their own classrooms with their own students” (p. 283). This is why I provided five mentor texts that we have in our library that they can utilize the next day if they so decide. It is also the reason why I provided them with videos that can help them feel confident in teaching with mentor texts.

I chose the professional development style that I did because it is important that the professional learning that is done is “relevant to our own students in our own classrooms” (Shearer et al., 2019, p. 283). This is why my professional development also focused on providing books that the students at our school can see themselves in and books the teachers can use right away.

When it came to my professional development sessions, teachers were able to participate in active learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Active learning is when teachers are provided opportunities to engage in professional development. “These experiences could include examining student artifacts, using materials that teachers then implement in their classrooms, engaging in lessons that teachers could use with students, and participating in or leading model lessons” (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 623). This is why I decided to model and then provide opportunities for the teachers to use the mentor texts to teach and try the strategies. Also, this active learning focuses on collaboration. “Collaboration engenders shared knowledge and expertise” (Shearer et al., 2019, p. 285).

Finally, I decided to provide videos of my teaching while utilizing the mentor text during the professional development because “Teachers benefit from seeing instructional practices in action, whether via video, demonstration lessons, peer observations, or case studies of teaching” (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 624). These are the theories behind why I designed the professional development sessions that I did.

Summary. This section addressed the important factors that I considered when designing my professional development, including collaboration, active learning, the relevance to student learning, and the use of learning objectives. In the next section I will address the setting of my capstone project.

Setting

In this section, the setting of my capstone project will be reviewed. My project took place in a midwestern suburban school district. The district has five elementary schools that target kindergarten through fourth grade students. The elementary schools

include about twenty classroom teachers in each building. In addition, the schools include specialist teachers. The school that this professional development was held at is made up of predominantly white students. The school has approximately 400 students enrolled. The enrollment in the district is approximately 5,000 students. Of those 5,000 students, 40% are in the free and reduced lunch program; 20% are in special education; and 12% are English Language Learners. Additionally, the families in the district have identified themselves as the following: 54% of the students are white, 27% of the students are Hispanic or Latino, and 9% of the students are African American. The rest of the students identify as other races. Additionally, it is important to note that 72% of the teachers in this district hold a master's degree or higher. My professional development session was presented to about twenty staff members at the school where I currently teach. I will address my participants next.

Participants

My intended audience was kindergarten through fourth grade teachers in the state of Minnesota at the school I teach. This district was previously described. Even more specifically, these teachers are classroom teachers. I did not incorporate specialist teachers into my professional development because my project and research targets literacy teachers. I will address my intended timeline next.

Timeline

In this section I will address my project timeline. This timeline was followed to make sure I completed my capstone project. My capstone project question was established in February of 2020. This question was, *How can elementary teachers utilize*

mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction? After my question was created, I was able to begin writing my first chapter. As the spring semester continued on, I was able to start my research. Throughout this process I actively searched for many resources on mentor texts and literacy instruction. In March and April of 2020, I closely read, annotated, and put together my literature review. This was my completion of Chapter Two.

At the end of April 2020, I decided to use my literature review to create a professional development opportunity for the staff at my school. This led to me researching effective professional development. I was then able to write Chapter Three in May 2020. As June 2020 came, I started to work on my capstone project. The first thing I did was use my school's library catalog to find five mentor texts for each grade level at my school. After I compiled the information into a professionally made handout for each teacher to have at the end of the professional development sessions. My next step was to create five teaching videos. These videos were created in June 2020. The videos were made to support staff in utilizing mentor texts. After the videos were created, I made an infographic sheet for staff, as well as a checklist for staff to use when selecting and utilizing mentor texts in the classroom. The final step was to create the Google slides to use during my capstone project professional development sessions. Three Google slide presentations were created.

After all the elements to my project were created, I was able to create a PDF project document. This was done in July 2020. It compiled all of my project pieces together including a three page summary of my capstone project. Following the project

document completion, I worked on finalizing my Chapter Four. Chapter Four was completed by the end of July 2020. My final project was completed and submitted in August 2020.

My capstone project was presented over three sessions. The first session was held in September 2020. This session was completed in forty five minutes. The second session was held in October 2020. This session was completed in forty five minutes too. The final session was held in November 2020. This session also lasted forty five minutes. The session timelines are outlined here. Each session followed the same format. I used the first five minutes for introductions and learning outcomes. The next ten minutes included an introduction activity. The following twenty to thirty minutes included the new information being presented and the last five minutes included a wrap up and goals for being set before the next session.

This timeline was used to make sure I stayed on track throughout my capstone project process and all elements of the project were completed. It allowed for my goals to be completed on time. Additionally, it shows how my sessions were structured. In this final section, I will summarize the chapter and introduce the next chapter.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I included a description of the capstone project. This project will be a multi-day professional development targeting elementary teachers who teach grades kindergarten through fourth. This chapter also included a summary of the research that was done on professional development and the theories behind my chosen project. Finally, Chapter Three included the setting, the target audience, and the timeline for my

project. In Chapter Four, you will read about the finalized project and my reflection on the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

In my first year as a teacher, I never would have imagined falling in love with teaching writing. After only a few weeks of teaching, I soon realized that writing instruction would become a passion of mine. It became a subject I quickly wanted to perfect. The exact combination of students not wanting to write and students struggling to find ideas, created a desire in me. I wanted every student in my classroom to enjoy writing just as much as I did. The best way to achieve this goal was to research writing instruction and my research led me to enroll in graduate school a few years later to obtain my Master of Arts in Literacy Education from Hamline University. I knew pretty early on that my capstone project would be linked to writing instruction but quickly discovered through my readings that mentor texts was the reason students loved to write and the reason students become better writers. Additionally, mentor texts were the reason I loved writing, too. This work led me to my capstone project question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?*

The purpose of my question was to discover how to properly utilize mentor texts in literacy instruction and then bring the information back to my staff to help us connect our curriculums and our writing instruction to be the best for all the students in our school. Throughout my research, I discovered that mentor texts increase student motivation and student engagement and they have a positive effect on students' growth and achievement in writing.

In this chapter, I will explain my learnings from the capstone process. Additionally, I will revisit my literature review and highlight the important discoveries that were made towards my research question. I will also explain the implications of my project and the limitations I came across as I worked. In addition, I will highlight future research projects that could be done related to mentor texts and writing instruction. This chapter will also address how my project results will be communicated. Finally, I will include how this capstone project on mentor texts will impact the teaching profession.

Major Learnings

Throughout my capstone project process, I have grown a lot as a student and a teacher. This process pushed me to look deeply at the issues in education, as well as, the successes. It taught me how to be a critical reader and researcher. Additionally, it taught me to stretch my thinking. There are many things that I learned throughout my capstone project, however three stand out to me the most. These will be addressed below.

The first major learning came to me as a researcher. I learned the importance of the role that mentor texts play in the classroom. Throughout my entire process, I was hopeful to find a connection between utilizing mentor texts and student achievement and engagement. This was found throughout my literature review and was a part of my own major learnings. I realized that utilizing mentor texts in my classroom should have a profound impact on my students. In a study done by Moses, Serafini, and Loyd (2016), I found that when teachers used mentor texts with kindergarten students, the students had an invitation to become authors on their own. This led them to feel more confident as

writers. Through this specific study, I learned the importance of mentor texts in classrooms.

Additionally, I discovered how mentor texts provide students opportunities to take risks. This led me to discover the importance of risk taking. Mentor texts give students writing practice with a mentor by their side. This takes away the fear of failure and pushes them to a new point in their learning. Finally, my research taught me that sharing my results from my literature review with staff members will encourage them to utilize mentor texts in their classrooms, too.

The second thing I learned came from being a writer during my capstone project. I learned how to effectively communicate my literature review with others and ask for help when I needed it. This part took me a lot of time to perfect and a lot of support from my peers. I learned to reach out to others to help me in my journey of becoming a writer. This is something that will continue to stay with me as I teach. I will remind my students that it is important to ask others for advice while learning. I know that I could not have finished this process without others supporting me and giving me feedback.

The final major learning came from being a student. I will always be learning how to be an effective teacher, this process never stops. Even though my district has provided me with a curriculum that uses mentor texts, I was not utilizing them to their full potential. Additionally, I had little idea on how to select mentor texts for use in my classroom, nor did I understand the importance of utilizing mentor texts while teaching writing. These discoveries led me to realize that there are so many things I thought I understood as an educator, until I pushed myself past my comfort zone. Diving in deeper

to this topic benefited my students. This is why I will continue to be a lifelong learner in my profession.

In this section you learned about my three major learnings from this project. I learned why utilizing mentor texts is so important to literacy instruction. Additionally, I learned that as a writer, I needed extra support from my peers. Finally, I learned that I will be a lifelong learner as I continue on my journey as a teacher. In this next section I will revisit my literature review.

Revisiting the Literature Review

Throughout my research on utilizing mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction, I discovered that my literature review could be broken down into five sections. These five sections will be highlighted below as they were the most important parts to creating my capstone project. These sections pushed me to understand the importance of utilizing mentor texts in literacy instruction. Additionally, I will explain my new understandings from my literature review and the connections I made.

Definition of mentor texts. The first thing that was important to understand in my literature review was the definition of mentor texts and who the top researchers were in the field. In my research, I discovered that mentor texts are used to create a bridge to help students connect authors' writing to their own writing (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015). Also, according to Dorfman and Cappelli (2007), "Mentor texts are pieces of literature that we can return to again and again as we help our young writers learn how to do what they may not yet be able to do on their own" (p. 2). After I understood mentor texts, I

knew I needed to understand how to select them in order to properly utilize them in the classroom.

Selection of mentor texts. The second part of my research led me to understanding how to select mentor texts. This is a process that can be done differently for different classrooms; however, I learned a few important things that must be kept in mind when selecting a mentor text. The first thing is that the book must be well loved. Secondly, mentor texts must be used frequently, over and over again so children are familiar with it (Sturgell, 2008). Finally, when selecting a mentor text, Dorfman and Cappelli (2007) state, “Mentor texts are as comfortable as a worn pair of blue jeans” (p. 3). This means the book must be familiar to the students and the teacher. This research led me to create lists for staff members to give them a head start in selecting mentor texts for their classroom. These lists identify familiar texts to students and teachers in our school. They also are diverse books, representing all students. The next section that proved to be most important in my literature review is how mentor texts play a role in literacy instruction.

Role of mentor texts. Mentor texts play an important role in writing instruction. Throughout my literature review, I discovered that utilizing mentor texts can be done through mini-lessons, scaffolding, and read alouds. I also discovered that reading and writing instruction tie closely together. According to Katie Ray (2012), one way to get students to listen like writers is through the practice of read alouds. I learned that if I start analyzing the author's crafts during read alouds, students are able to think like an author when using mentor texts in writing. This is why I created videos to show staff. These

videos showed how to utilize mentor texts through the use of read alouds and identifying authors' crafts. They demonstrate questions to ask students. Mentor texts play a huge role in literacy instruction especially when it comes to student engagement and student achievement.

Student engagement. In my literature review, I realized that when books are accessible to all students, students are more willing and eager to share their ideas and connections (Moser, 2017). Mentor texts become accessible to all students because the teacher is guiding them through the writing process. Additionally, students benefit from mentor texts because it teaches students to think like authors and creates ownership. Finally, when students are more engaged, there is more likely to be a positive impact on student achievement. These findings are the motivating factors in my Google slides.

Student achievement. In my last section of the literature review, I researched the increase on student achievement when mentor texts are used. I discovered that students are more engaged in lessons if a mentor text is used and when students are engaged they are more successful. This is because mentor texts teach students to read with an author's lens, showing them the thought processes behind authors' decisions (Gainer, 2013). Once students are able to read with an author's lens, they are able to borrow thoughtful ideas from mentor texts and use them in their own writing. Therefore, they are more likely to be successful writers. All of these sections led me to my own learning and understanding of my capstone project question.

My understanding and learning. Throughout my literature review, I learned that any book can become a mentor text and can be utilized in the classroom with the proper

research and focus from the teacher. I also realized that I have been utilizing many mentor texts in my classroom without realizing or even considering that it was a mentor text. Finally, I have made the connection between close reading and mentor texts. I always knew reading and writing instruction tied closely together; however, I realized that when students are using mentor texts with their teacher, they are close reading each page looking at the author's craft. Close reading has always been a part of my reading instruction and I am excited to make the connection into my students' writing instruction, too.

In this section, the importance of my literature review was discussed. Additionally, I highlighted how my literature review progressed to lead me to my new understandings and learnings. This was done through the definition of mentor texts, the selection of mentor texts, and the role of mentor texts in literacy instruction. I also highlighted my key findings on mentor texts with student engagement and student achievement. In the next section, the implications of my capstone project will be discussed.

Implications of Project

The implication of my project is that the staff will grow in their understanding of utilizing mentor texts in the classroom. Additionally, they will know how to select their own mentor texts for their students. I feel that teachers also will have a better understanding about the importance of diverse mentor texts being used in their classrooms. These implications will then impact the students at my current school.

Students will become more engaged and achieve more when teachers are utilizing mentor texts of a diverse range in their classroom setting.

Finally, I feel administration will need to do a better job providing teachers with texts to use as mentor texts. Diverse books and books with different author's crafts should be provided for teachers' classroom libraries. This is because teachers need the resources to utilize and implement mentor texts successfully in their classroom. This will have far reaching implications because it goes from being professional development sessions, to something that will leave a lasting impact on their teaching and learning with the proper resources invested. Next, I will address the project limitations.

Limitations of Project

This section will address any limitations. My project has three limitations. The first limitation is, how to successfully share all of the information of my literature review with short time-frames available for my professional development sessions. Time always seems to be a limiting factor in education. There is never enough time to teach, learn, and grow as educators. Finding a way to share the months of literature I discovered in three sessions was a big limitation and hopefully in the future there will be time to share more.

The second limitation is, my project was specifically designed for one school district and one specific school. If I were to use my presentation with other schools, I would need to specifically look at the books they have available in their library and the diversity of their students. I would want the mentor texts to be accessible and the mentor texts to represent the students in their school. If another school were to use this

presentation, they would have to adapt the mentor text resource sheets to meet the needs of their students and staff.

The final project limitation comes from my own literature review. My capstone project question was, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* While my capstone project question specifically addresses utilizing mentor texts, I realized the more that I researched, the more utilizing mentor texts comes down to the specific classroom and the teacher. There is no specific one list of mentor texts that will work for writing skills. Mentor texts work because of the relationship that the reader creates with the book. This limitation allows for future research on mentor texts to be done. The next section will address future research.

Future Research

There are a few ways I could see my research continuing from this project. The first way would be through staff utilizing mentor texts and wanting more mentor texts for their classroom. I could see myself creating a resource sheet of the top twenty-five most used mentor texts in elementary writing. When addressing my project limitations, I know that there may not be a specific list that will fit all for everyone in the classroom. This future research would involve closely studying the use of specific mentor texts in all elementary classrooms. I feel that data and writing samples would need to be taken to show the growth. This could be done through a controlled study. Classroom teachers could be given specific mentor texts to use. Then they could look at how that mentor text impacted students writing.

In addition, I could see my research leading to middle school and high school grade levels. I would love to look closely at the impact mentor texts have on students' engagement and achievement at the secondary level and if students who utilize mentor texts at the elementary level have a more successful writing life than their peers who do not use mentor texts. It would be helpful to use a specific mentor text in grade levels to see the impact it has on writers at that level.

Finally, I think research could be done on the impact of my professional development sessions. We could look at how the teachers utilize mentor texts within their classroom. I would look closely at the selection of mentor texts, the amount of times they use mentor texts, and the comfort level of using mentor texts to scaffold writing instruction. The next section will be how my results are communicated.

Communication of Results

My results will be communicated throughout my capstone project. The information I researched and found will be shared with staff over three professional development sessions. Additionally, I will include my created staff handouts and resource sheets to help all teachers at my school understand how to utilize mentor texts in literacy instruction. I will also have the presentation and handouts available to additional staff in my district that are interested in utilizing mentor texts in their classrooms. This will benefit more teachers and students.

Benefits to Profession

This capstone project benefits the teaching profession in two major ways. The first way is it provides teachers with the resources to be better prepared for writing

instruction. My project includes handouts, checklists, and videos for teachers to follow along with when utilizing mentor texts. This will give teachers the confidence to use mentor texts and give students an opportunity to be more engaged and achieve more in writing.

Secondly, I feel this project benefits the teaching profession because it takes a look at the reality of providing diverse mentor texts to our students. Diverse books need to be included in our classroom and my resource sheets and my presentation to staff highlights the importance of students seeing themselves and others in the books that we read to them. This includes books that are teaching writing skills such as mentor texts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how my project relates to my capstone project question, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* I have addressed my learnings from the capstone project; I have revisited the important sections of my literature review and how it relates to my project; and I have stated the implications and limitations of my project. In addition, I have discussed the future research that can be done and how my research and results will be shared. Finally, I have addressed the benefits that my capstone project will have on the profession of teaching.

Throughout my capstone project process, I have learned that my work as a scholar has pushed me to understand, *How can elementary teachers utilize mentor texts in elementary literacy instruction?* Additionally, I have worked to create a project, three professional development sessions with resources, that will have an impact on my school

and, hopefully the education profession. My hope is that my capstone project will have an impact on the way teachers utilize mentor texts in their own literacy instruction. Finishing my capstone project was not an easy task; however, I am moving forward with more knowledge on mentor texts, more knowledge on literacy instruction, and, most importantly, more knowledge about myself as a lifelong learner.

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