eMentoring: Connecting Teacher Candidates with K-12 Students from Urban Schools

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This paper reports on a program that partnered, one-on-one, teacher candidates at a suburban University with K-12 students at urban schools. The paired teacher candidates and students communicated on a weekly basis using a monitored e-mail system. Teacher candidates' perceptions of the program were collected using an online survey. Although the results need to be interpreted cautiously given the non-experimental nature of the study, the data collected supported the conclusions that the eMentoring project improved teacher candidate attitudes toward teaching in an urban setting, increased their awareness of the impact technology can have in the classroom, helped prepare teacher candidates to be teachers, and increased their interest in teaching in an urban school district.

Keywords: teacher preparation, eMentoring, school-university partnerships, pre-service teachers, urban schools, technology

INTRODUCTION

Teacher candidates bring firmly held beliefs about teaching and learning with them to their teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, Zeichner & Gore, 1990). According to Lortie (1975) these beliefs developed through an apprenticeship of observation during elementary and secondary schooling. These beliefs influence and often constrain what our teacher candidates are willing to learn about teaching students from cultures and contexts different from their own. This raises the question about how to better prepare teacher candidates to teach in schools that are different from their own cultural, racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds (Tiezzi and Cross, 1997).

National and State teacher accrediting agencies have defined teacher standards and certification policies which compel universities and colleges to examine their programs and align them to these high standards. National Certification License Board (NCLB) regulations require qualified teachers to demonstrate they are ready to teach ALL students in classrooms, especially in urban school districts. To meet these standards,

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teacher preparation universities across the nation have redesigned their education programs to ensure that graduating teacher candidates have varied field experiences and demonstrate skills and competencies to integrate technology to increase learning.

To make technology integration more successful and meaningful for teacher candidates, teacher-training institutions need to provide experiences that focus on this integration (Thompson, 2000). This can best be achieved when schools and universities collaborate, implementing the concept of *simultaneous renewal* (Hartshorne, Ferdig, & Dawson, 2005). Goodlad (1994) summarizes this potential school-university collaboration:

> There must be a continuous process of educational renewal in which colleges and universities, the traditional producers of teachers, join schools, the recipients of these products, as equal partners in the simultaneous renewal of school and the education of educators. (p. 2)

School-university partnerships provide opportunities to assess pedagogical practices in an authentic context, which is especially important in the area of technology integration (Hartshorne et al., 2005). The necessity to provide early field experiences for teacher candidates in urban schools is fully understood (Tiezzi and Cross, 1997). The project described in this paper grew out of a need for highly qualified teachers who are able to integrate technology and who are ready to teach all students, especially students in urban school districts. Through a school-university partnership, teacher candidates at West Chester University were provided opportunities to visit urban schools, work one-on-one with K-12 students and witness first-hand the relevance of technology in the classroom. This paper will attempt to answer the research question: Is such an eMentoring project a valuable experience for our teacher candidate mentors?

eMENTORING

Mentoring is a not a new term or concept. The word 'mentor' can be traced all the way back to Homer's Odyssey. Before leaving on his voyage Odysseus asks his friend Mentor to oversee the upbringing of his son Telemachus. Subsequently, mentoring has become synonymous for referring to any relationship in which a more experienced person helps a less experienced person to grow personally and professionally (Mueller, 2004).

Education has long found mentoring effective and with the advent of online tools, comes eMentoring, sometimes referred to as online mentoring, cyber-mentoring, or even virtual mentoring. Instead of actual face-to-face meetings, e-mentoring uses asynchronous, electronic communications to establish and support the mentoring relationship. Knowledge and skills are still shared and transferred but the mentor and mentee may never meet in person (Akin and Hilbun, 2007). Perhaps the best definition for eMentoring comes from Mihram (2004) which states: The merger of mentoring with electronic communications to develop and sustain mentoring relationships linking a senior individual (mentor) and a lesser skilled or experienced individual (protégé) independent of geography or scheduling conflicts.

eMentoring has significant implications for mentoring. This is because, as Bierema and Merriam (2002) assert, "successful mentoring involves frequent and regular interaction … [but] barriers such as time, work responsibilities, geographical distance and lack of trust often reduce, if not halt, interaction" (p. 214). The authors of this papers assert that eMentoring has potential to mitigate some of these barriers. eMentoring merges traditional mentoring with technology and, because of its ease of use, is increasingly used as the preferred choice of communication (Stokes, Garrett-Harris, & Hunt, 2003). It comes as no surprise that eMentoring has been carried out in various K-12 environments and continues to grow in popularity (O'Neill & Harris, 2004).

THE eMENTORING PROJECT

This study examined one project that grew from a concerted effort to provide an authentic technology integration and urban teaching experience to teacher candidates, the majority of whom come to West Chester University having graduated from suburban or rural high schools. The convergence of need for urban experiences, the goals of our educational technology course, the available technology to connect classroom-to-classroom, in conjunction with the support of a partnership between West Chester University, the Philadelphia School District and IBM set this project in motion.

Email has supported mentoring relationships since the late 1980's (Bull, Harris, Lloyd, & Short, 1989), and according to O'Neill & Harris (2004) most eMentoring projects currently use e-mail as the medium for communication. For this project we used a monitored e-mail system, IBM's MentorPlace at www.mentorplace.org. The MentorPlace system was selected because of its ease of use, and through our partnership with IBM was provide at no cost to West Chester University and the Philadelphia School District. The use of eMentoring facilitated the interaction of West Chester University teacher candidates with K-12 students.

After an initial visit and tour of the K-12 schools at the beginning of the semester, our pre-service teachers engaged in eMentoring of K-12 students individually. The project paired teacher candidates with students from urban classrooms through an electronic interface for one semester. The pairing was done in MentorPlace by IBM employees with input from the West Chester University professors and Philadelphia School District teachers. Every week the K-12 student sent a message to his/her mentor. The West Chester University teacher candidates responded in kind.

As Mueller (2004) writes "most mentoring relationships share at least three stages: getting acquainted, maintenance and closure"(p.54). The first messages posted between teacher candidate mentors and Philadelphia K-12 students were autobiographical, to establish the relationship between teacher candidate and student. Subsequent communication was based on what the K-12 students were learning in science class.

The teacher candidate mentors and Philadelphia K-12 students were supported using direct facilitation, a process in which a third party closely follows and participates, as necessary, in the eMentoring dialogue. The best facilitators are those with Internet-based communication experience and K-12 teaching experience (O'Neill & Harris, 2004). However, for the purpose of this research study, the content of the messages was not analyzed. The University professor leading each class and the corresponding K-12 classroom teacher assumed the shared role of facilitator, serving as playground monitors of sorts. The professors kept track of the frequency of messages, making sure there were weekly exchanges between the teacher candidate and K-12 student. The K-12 teachers reviewed the content of each K-12 student message before it was sent. This was done primarily to help each student with their writing skills, but ultimately the teacher candidate and K-12 student were responsible for the success of the exchange. Partnered one-on-one, the teacher candidates and K-12 students communicated regularly using the MentorPlace e-mail system.

Originally developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March, a WebQuest is an inquire-oriented activity in which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the Web (Dodge, 1998). Creating a webquest was already part of the EDM 300 Introduction to Educational Technology Integration course taken by the teacher candidates. In an attempt to make the webquest project more authentic and provide each K-12 school with new online curriculum, teacher candidates developed a WebQuest for the class they were partnered with.

The content of the WebQuest that the teacher candidate developed was the same

content that was being addressed in the classroom of the student being mentored, namely pollution. Thus, the WebQuest served as a way of helping the teacher candidate understand what was being taught and made the candidate better able to address questions the student might have. The focus of the interactions was the science curriculum, with the K-12 students asking the teacher candidates questions pertaining to a specific science topic.

At the end of the semester, a 'Final Celebration' was held at West Chester University. The Philadelphia students and teachers took a forty-five minute bus ride to the University campus. This event included brief remarks from IBM, West Chester University and Philadelphia School District representatives, presentations of Webquest projects by Philadelphia students, and a luncheon in the University dining hall. This event brought closure to the project and provided another opportunity for the teacher candidate mentors and K-12 mentees to meet face-to-face.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this eMentoring project were teacher candidates enrolled in the class "EDM 300 - Introduction to Educational Technology Integration," during the spring semester at West Chester University. EDM300 is a class designed to prepare teacher candidates to use technology in their classrooms. Students typically take the class in their sophomore or junior years of college. In the class, students not only learn how the technologies work, but also learn how to apply them to teach students in the classroom.

West Chester University is a medium-sized college in southeastern Pennsylvania, with approximately 14,000 students. Formerly West Chester Normal School, a teacher-training institution, the school has grown into both a liberal arts and a professional development university. College of Education students make up about a third of the enrollment. The College of Education offers programs in early childhood, elementary, secondary and special education. The majority of students in the College of Education are female, middle class and Caucasian, with the majority coming from suburban areas.

Of those who participated in the study, the majority, 85%, were female. Fifty-six percent were sophomores and twenty-nine percent were juniors. There were a smaller number of freshmen or seniors, eight and seven percent respectively. Fifty-six percent of the candidates indicated that they were either solely elementary education majors, or were dual majors, combining elementary education, early childhood or special education. Thirty-one percent indicated they were secondary education majors. Other majors included early childhood or special education, with three teacher candidates indicating they were liberal arts majors or undeclared. Seventy percent of the teacher candidates came from a suburban school district, with only 7% coming from an urban school district and 21% coming from a rural district. The large majority reported that they were Caucasian, non-Hispanic, 95.3%. Of the remaining four candidates, three indicated that they were a mix of White/non-Hispanic and either Hispanic or Indian, and one responded that she was African-American.

THE SURVEY

These teacher candidates were surveyed to evaluate the objectives of the eMentoring program and its effectiveness in preparing the candidates to be teachers. Specifically, the objectives of the program were as follows:
  1. Provide an opportunity for the teacher candidates to interact with K-12 students

one-on-one
2. Provide an authentic opportunity for pre-service teachers to use technology and seeing its impact first-hand
3. Provide an urban experience for pre-service teachers at West Chester University
4. Improve attitudes toward teaching in an urban school district
5. Increase teacher candidate interest in teaching in an urban setting such as the Philadelphia School District

In order to address these objectives, the following questions/issues were used as the basis for developing the survey that teacher candidates were asked to fill out:
1. Did participation in eMentoring result in a more favorable attitude toward teaching in an urban setting? If so, in what way did it create a more favorable attitude?
2. Did participation in eMentoring result in a significant improvement of perceptions of the Philadelphia School District?
3. Did participation in eMentoring result in a greater awareness of the impact technology can make in the classroom?
4. Did participation in eMentoring help teacher candidates prepare to become teachers? If so, in what way did it do so?
5. Did participation in eMentoring result in an increased likelihood that teacher candidates would consider working in the Philadelphia School District?

Survey items were generated to address these questions. In developing the survey, it was decided that it was important to provide teacher candidates with preset, rather than open-ended responses, to ensure uniformity of responses that would aid in our analyses. Responses from a previous semester were used to generate this response set. In this previous survey, teacher candidates had been asked the following open-ended questions: "How did participation in eMentoring change your perceptions of teaching in an urban setting?" and "How did participation in eMentoring help you to prepare to be a teacher?" The responses to this survey were sorted into categories and each category was then consolidated into one response, which was used on the final survey. A list of the response options is provided in Tables 2 and 4. Candidates were also provided with an "Other" category for those who wished to write their own responses. For the question pertaining to perception of the impact of eMentoring participation on teaching in an urban setting, candidates were required to choose only one response, while for the question dealing with the effect on helping them prepare to be a teacher, candidates were allowed to choose multiple responses.

The response options for two other questions were rating scales; a five-point rating scale was used for the attitude toward the Philadelphia School District, and a seven-point scale was used for the likelihood of considering working in the Philadelphia School District. The possible responses to these questions are provided in Tables 3 and 5. The response to the questions about whether eMentoring made the candidates aware of the impact of technology in the classroom were dichotomous, with either a "Yes," or "No" response.

PROCEDURES

Data were collected from five sections of the EDM 300 class, which had participated in the eMentoring program. Of those five sections, three sections, taught by the same professor, had been assigned to one school, while the other two sections, taught by two different professors, were assigned to a different school. Both schools were located in Philadelphia.

The data were collected using an online survey administered at the end of the

semester. While candidates were encouraged to respond to the survey, their participation was voluntary. The survey was anonymous; teacher candidates were not asked to identify themselves. They were asked, however, to provide demographic information, as well as provide information about their perceptions of the effect of participation in the eMentoring experience.

For most of the variables, the data was analyzed by calculating percentages for each response. For those items where students were asked to choose or not choose a response, the percentages of those choosing the response were provided. For those where students were asked to rate agreement with a statement along a continuum, the percentages of those choosing each of the response options were determined. In addition, differences between subgroups of students will be examined. If possible, chi-square will be used to assess differences in frequency of responses among the different subgroups.

RESULTS

The number and percent of students responding to the survey is provided in Table 1, broken down by professor. The response rates were not equal across all professors. In the case of Professor C, the low response rate was due to the fact that the assignment of filling out the survey was given as an out-of-class assignment, while Professors A and B required the students to complete the survey in class.

Table 1. Response Rates by Professors' Sections

Professor	Number of Sections	Students in Sections	N (%) Responding
Professor A	3	79	52 (66)
Professor B	1	26	19 (73)
Professor C	1	27	13 (48)

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING IN AN URBAN SETTING

Possible responses regarding the effect of participation in eMentoring upon candidates' views of teaching in an urban setting are provided in Table 2, along with the frequency that each response was chosen. Candidates could choose only one answer.

The most frequent response was that the teacher candidate realized that he or she could enjoy teaching in an urban setting and that he/she could actually make an impact. Over one fifth of the teacher candidates chose this response after participating in the eMentoring program.

As stated previously, teacher candidates were only instructed to choose only One option on this portion of the questionnaire. It is likely that, if given the opportunity, candidates might have chosen more than one option. For example, the nineteen candidates who indicated that they realized they could enjoy teaching in an urban setting and make an impact may also have felt a greater sense of responsibility as well.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

The teacher candidates' views regarding their perceptions of the Philadelphia School District after participating in the eMentoring project are provided in Table 3. Teacher candidates were asked whether participation in eMentoring had caused their perception of the Philadelphia School District to improve a lot, improve a little, stay the same, worsen a little, or worsen a lot.

Of the 86 who responded, 57% indicated that their perceptions of the Philadelphia School District had improved, with 16, or 18.6%, indicating that it had improved a lot. Only one candidate indicated that his or her perceptions had worsened, and only a little. The perceptions of 36 candidates stayed the same.

Table2. Change in Perceptions of Teaching in an Urban Setting

Response	N	%
I realize I could enjoy teaching in an urban setting and make an impact.	19	22.1
It made me aware that teaching in an urban setting would challenge me as a teacher, but ultimately make me a better teacher.	17	19.8
My perceptions didn't change because I had limited interactions with my student.	13	15.1
I am more aware of the difficulties of teaching in an urban setting.	11	12.8
I understand the unique challenges of teaching in an urban setting.	10	11.6
My perceptions didn't change because I was already familiar with the issues related to teaching in an urban setting.	7	8.1
I feel a greater sense of responsibility for students in urban settings.	5	5.8
I now realize that urban schools are similar to all other schools.	3	3.5
I realize that teaching in an urban setting is safer than I thought.	1	1.2

Table 3. Change in Perceptions of the Philadelphia School District

Response	N	%
Improved a lot	16	18.6
Improved a little	33	38.4
Stayed the same	36	41.9
Worsened a little	1	1.2
Worsened a lot	0	0.0

AWARENESS OF THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

Teacher candidates were asked whether participation in eMentoring made them aware of the impact technology can have in the classroom. Of the 86 candidates, 57, or 66.3%, indicated that eMentoring made them aware of the impact technology can have.

PREPARING CANDIDATES TO BE TEACHERS

Possible responses to the question pertaining to the impact of participation in eMentoring in helping one prepare to be a teacher are provided in Table 4, along with the percentages of those who answered "yes" to each of the questions. Candidates could choose more than one answer.

Table 4. How eMentoring Helped Prepare Teacher Candidates for Teaching

Response	N	%
It has made me aware of the diversity of students.	54	62.8
It made me feel good about my decision to be a teacher.	52	60.5
It has made me aware of students' interests, behaviors, knowledge and abilities.	49	57.0
It showed me that I am able to have a positive impact on students.	46	53.5
It made me aware of what students are learning in schools.	44	51.2
It helped me learn to interact with students who are different than I am.	43	50.0
It helped me learn how to communicate with students at their level.	39	45.3
It gave me confidence in my abilities as a prospective teacher.	35	40.7
It let me experience and understand urban education and its challenges.	34	39.5
It helped me to better understand what it is like to be a teacher.	34	39.5
It made me aware of the special needs of students in urban settings.	22	25.6
It helped me improve my teaching skills.	20	23.5
It did not help me because my student didn't respond or responded very little.	13	15.1
It made me question my decision to be a teacher.	7	8.1
It did not help me because I've already participated in an e-Mentoring program.	1	1.2

At least 50% of the teacher candidates indicated that participation in eMentoring made them aware of the diversity of students that existed, helped them feel good about their decision to be a teacher, made them aware of students and their interests, behaviors, knowledge and abilities, gave them a sense that they could have a positive impact on students, made them aware of what students are learning in school, and helped them learn how to interact with students who are different than they are.

LIKELIHOOD OF WORKING IN PHILADELPHIA

Teacher candidates were asked whether, as a result of participation in eMentoring, their likelihood to consider working in the Philadelphia School District had changed. The responses are provided in Table 5.

Over fifty percent of the respondents indicated that it made them more likely to consider working in the Philadelphia School District. Ten candidates, or 11.6%, indicated that it made them much more likely to consider working in Philadelphia. Only five or 5.8% were less likely to consider working in Philadelphia.

To address the question of whether teacher candidates from different demographic groups benefited differentially from eMentoring, a frequency count was conducted to assess differences in frequencies between groups. If sufficient variability were present, a formal chi-square analysis would be conducted.

For the demographic variables race, gender, and level of education, it was not possible to conduct a chi-square analysis due to insufficient variability; the sample was very homogenous. Type of District showed some variability as there were a significant number of students from both suburban and rural districts in the sample. However, due to the fact that there were only six students from urban districts, it was not possible to conduct a chi-square analysis to test for differences in frequencies, as chi-square requires at least five cases in each cell. Although no formal analysis was possible, the data suggests that there may be differences between responses by district. More data would need to be collected to confirm these results.

There were two variables where differences were suggestive. The distribution of responses to the statement, *It made me aware of the diversity of students,* are provided in Table 6 broken down by district.

Table 5. Changes in Likelihood of Working in the Philadelphia School District

Likelihood	N	%
Much more likely	10	11.6
Somewhat more likely	12	14.0
A little more likely	23	26.7
As likely as before	36	41.9
A little less likely	3	3.5
Somewhat less likely	2	2.3
A lot less likely	0	0.0

Table 6. Made Candidates More Aware of Diversity of Students Broken Down by District

Type of District	Did not make them more aware of the diversity of students	Made them more aware of the diversity of students
	N (%)	N (%)
Urban	5 (83.3)	1 (16.7)
Suburban	19 (31.7)	41 (68.3)
Rural	7 (38.9)	11 (61.1)

It would appear that those teacher candidates coming from suburban or rural districts are more likely to become aware of the diversity of students through eMentoring than those coming from an urban district. This would be expected since candidates from urban districts are more likely to have already been exposed to the types of students encountered in this eMentoring experience than those in the other districts. However, although this is a logical conclusion, it should again be stressed that these results are based upon only six students from urban districts. More data is needed.

Table 7. *Learned to Interact with Different Students Broken Down by District*

Type of District	Experience did not help them	Experience helped them
	N (%)	N (%)
Urban	5 (83.3)	1 (16.7)
Suburban	33 (55.0)	27 (45.0)
Rural	5 (27.8)	13 (72.2)

A similar relationship was found between district and the variable: *It helped me learn to interact with students who are different than I am*. The breakdown is provided in Table 7.

The effect of district seemed to increase going from urban to rural districts. Whereas the vast major of those who came out of an urban setting did not benefit in learning to interact with students who are different than they are, the vast majority of candidates from a rural school district did. Candidates from suburban districts fell in between. Again, these results are just suggestive need to be interpreted cautiously in light of the

small number of students from urban districts. More data would need to be collected to verify this conclusion.

CANDIDATES WHOSE PERCEPTIONS CHANGED GREATLY

There were a number of teacher candidates who appeared to benefit greatly from this eMentoring experience. Sixteen candidates indicated that their perceptions of the Philadelphia School District had improved a lot, including 10 candidates who indicated that they were much more likely to consider working at the Philadelphia School District. So as to better understand who the candidates were who benefited most from the eMentoring experience, their profiles are described below. Because of the small numbers, this analysis was done informally, making any conclusions tentative.

For the most part these groups were similar to the sample as a whole. However, they differed in two distinct ways: 1) there were no freshmen and 2) there were no candidates from urban settings in either group. The lack of candidates from urban backgrounds could be explained by the fact that these candidates had already been exposed to an urban setting, as mentioned previously. That there were no freshmen in these groups might be explained by the fact that freshmen might not be ready for an experience such as eMentoring since they are just beginning to develop as teachers. This conclusion is suggestive, but not definitive, since it is only based upon seven teacher candidates. More research is needed.

FINDINGS AND LIMITATIONS

The results of the analysis must be interpreted cautiously as the method that is being used is self-report. Assuming that the self-report is accurate, the data do seem to provide evidence to support the conclusion that participation in this project resulted in a more favorable attitude toward teaching in an urban setting, an improvement of perceptions of the Philadelphia School District and an increased interest in teaching there, a greater awareness of the impact technology can make in the classroom, an increased sensitivity and awareness of the diversity of students, as well as in an increased awareness of the needs of students and what they are learning. The eMentoring program seemed to benefit teacher candidates by providing them with an opportunity to interact with students who are different than they are. It appeared to help our teacher candidates learn to interact with students in general, and assisted in either reinforcing or questioning candidates' decisions to become a teacher or helped them question that decision.

Overall the eMentoring program was considered a positive experience. However, teacher candidates from an urban district seemed less likely to benefit from participation than those from suburban or rural districts. It was also suggested that freshmen are less likely to benefit than teacher candidates from other levels.

These conclusions must be tempered by the limitations of the study. For one thing, not all teacher candidates responded to the survey. For example, only about one-half of the candidates in Professor C's class completed the survey. Those who decided not to respond may have had a different attitude toward eMentoring. This could have potentially altered the outcome of this study. As mentioned above, the self-report nature of the study might have affected the results. There is the potential that students recognized the purpose of the study and responded positively on the follow-up survey as a way of fulfilling the researchers' expectations. Since one of the researchers was their professor, perhaps they might have thought that by giving a positive response it would somehow help their grade, even though the survey was anonymous. And finally, the limited numbers of participants should be noted, particularly when trying to make conclusions

about the effect of the type of district the student was from. A subsequent study that looked more closely at this variable is needed.

A significant number of the teacher candidates went to the school during the program and met the students. It is not clear at this point what effect actually interacting with the students in person versus interacting with the students online had upon the results of the study. Clearly, however, many teacher candidates viewed the use of technology as valuable. In future research, it would be important to try to determine whether the visitation of the school had a significant impact as opposed to not visiting the school.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests that the mentoring of students from a different background helps to begin to break down stereotypes that teacher candidates have acquired, helping them understand the students they are mentoring. Teaching candidates begin to see that it might be possible to teach and make an impact in an urban setting.

It should be noted that eMentoring can be valuable for all candidates, including those who were raised in an urban setting. For one thing, it gives candidates the experience as a mentor-teacher, and makes them aware of what students are like and how to talk to them. Because of this interaction, candidates may be emboldened in their decision to be a teacher, or to call that decision into question.

In their eMentoring research Spaid, Fleisher and Himanshu (2009) concluded that eMentors also reaped the benefits of developing a meaningful relationship with interesting, engaged, and engaging adolescents. Developing a genuine regard for mentees as people rather than just students, they learned how to detect and address clues that signaled academic and emotional difficulties while exploring the boundaries of teacher/friend and adult/authority at a comfortable distance. What is most significant is that preservice teachers discovered ways that technology-based strategies honor and motivate multicultural students.

Based upon the reactions of the teacher candidates, it can be concluded that an eMentoring experience has the potential to be a powerful virtual experience. This way of mentoring may have some advantages over an actual mentoring program. By using an electronic medium, teacher candidates can be exposed to a different culture in a way that is not threatening to them. Whereas they may be less willing to volunteer to physically mentor someone in an urban setting, they may be willing to do so from a computer, which allows them to remain in a familiar setting. And while they may not have the time to drive into Philadelphia to tutor, teacher candidates may be able to find a few minutes to interact with a student on the computer, responding to the students on their schedule.

The relationships formed during ementoring can have reciprocal benefits for both the mentor and protege (Shpigelman et al, 2008). So an important consideration is to assure that both mentors and those being mentored are actually interacting with one another. Mentors can only benefit from the experience if those who they are mentoring respond, and vice versa. Those in charge of an eMentoring program must ensure that all candidates and K-12 students are on task to guarantee the success of the program. However, even those with the best intentions may find that it is not possible to force candidates and students to interact.

The question that was used in the survey regarding working in the Philadelphia School District was phrased as asking whether participation in this eMentoring program increased the likelihood of candidates' considering working in the district. However, even if a candidate were to respond positively to this question, there is no guarantee that this change will actually translate into employment in the Philadelphia School District.

Attitudes were being measured, not behavior. Whether the attitude is translated into actual employment is not addressed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This school-university partnership is providing an opportunity for our teacher candidates to visit urban classrooms, work one-on-one with a K-12 student, and see for themselves the relevance and potential of technology integration. eMentoring enabled us to overcome the time and place constraints that can hamper traditional field placements. Physical proximity and class schedules are often used as the criteria for selecting field placements. This can have a very limiting effect on the kind of field experiences teacher education programs can provide.

Providing teacher candidates with an initial urban field experience through electronic mentoring has been a relative success. It would be very beneficial to expand such a program so that all West Chester University teacher candidates can experience this. Ultimately our goal is to prepare quality teachers ready to teach ALL students. This article provides some evidence for the benefits of eMentoring, although more research needs to be done. Other teacher preparation programs may be encouraged by the possibilities of eMentoring, and may wish to take a closer look at developing such a program. eMentoring allowed us to provide a valuable authentic urban experience for our teacher candidates, while supporting the development of traditionally disadvantaged K-12 urban classrooms.

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