



Higher Education  
Quality Council  
of Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario

# Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Participating in a Peer Mentorship Practicum Model

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Published by

## The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

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### Cite this publication in the following format:

Grierson, A. L., Wideman-Johnston, T., Tedesco, S., Brewer, C. A., & Cantalini-Williams, M. (2014). *Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Participating in a Peer Mentorship Practicum Model*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.



## Acknowledgements

The authors extend their gratitude to Dr. Tracey Curwen, who completed the quantitative analyses detailed in this report. Finally, and most importantly, the authors thank the teacher candidates who participated in this study.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaires

Appendix B: Mean Responses to Each Survey Question

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## Executive Summary

### Context

This three-year study explored the perceptions of pre-service candidates in a five-year concurrent teacher education program who participated in a peer mentorship practicum model. In this practicum model teacher candidates were placed as a dyad, with each novice first-year candidate paired with a second- or third-year candidate who acted as a peer mentor. Ideally, the pair was then placed in the same classroom under the supervision of the same hosting associate teacher. However, each year constraints presented by candidates requesting different geographic areas for their placements and/or a lack of associate teachers in some locations who were willing to host two candidates (i.e., a novice and a mentor) necessitated placing between 5 and 8% of candidates in another classroom in the same school as their mentorship partner or in another school in close geographic proximity. The objective of the peer mentorship model was to foster collaborative practice between novice and mentor candidates, which was perceived to hold the potential to provide additional support for both candidates.

### Research Questions

The research questions addressed the perspectives of novice teacher candidates and the perspectives of mentor teacher candidates of the benefits and challenges of participating in a practicum model that combined peer mentorship between two candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these candidates and their hosting associate teacher. Additionally, the research questions focused on exploring variations in the perspectives of novice candidates and variations in the perspectives of mentor candidates between years of implementation of this practicum model. Variations in the perspectives of candidates placed in the same class versus those placed in a different classroom than their peer mentorship partner and variations in the perceptions of mentor candidates who had versus those who lacked the novice experience in this model were also explored.

### Methods

Teacher candidates were invited to take part in this study in each year (2009, 2010, 2011) that they were a novice and/or a mentor candidate in this practicum model. Approximately 200 mentors and 200 novices were invited to complete pre- and post-practicum surveys each year. Over one-third of the potential novice participants and over one-third of the potential mentor participants completed each pre- and/or post-practicum survey. Likert-type items solicited participants' ratings (using a five-point scale) to questions about the effectiveness of their preparation for this model, their frequency of engagement in the intended peer mentorship experiences, and how beneficial they perceived these experiences to be for novice and mentor candidates. Additionally the surveys solicited participants' open-ended responses to four questions about the benefits and challenges of taking part in this practicum model. Quantitative analysis focused on the post-practicum survey responses. The Likert-type ratings within participant groups (i.e., novices, mentors), over time (i.e., 2009, 2010, 2011) and between different groups of participants (e.g., same versus different class placement) were explored by conducting analysis of variance (ANOVA). Additionally, Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficients (i.e.,  $r$ 's) were computed to measure the linear relationship between variables (e.g., benefits of collaboration through the mentorship activities for novices and for their mentor partners). The open-ended response data collected through each pre- and post-practicum survey were analyzed by coding and categorizing key ideas as described by Creswell (2009).

### Summary of Results

Across all three years the quantitative and open-ended response results demonstrated that the peer mentorship model achieved the objective of fostering collaborative practice between novice and mentor

candidates, and that this collaboration was perceived to provide additional support that was beneficial to both candidates in the mentorship dyad. Consistently, novices rated the methods intended to prepare them for this model as moderately effective, their frequency of collaboration as above moderate, engaging in this collaboration as approaching very beneficial for novices and as above moderately beneficial for their mentor partners. Novices' ratings and mentors' ratings were not impacted by whether mentor candidates were second-year or third-year teacher candidates. Across all three years mentors also rated their frequency of collaboration as above moderate, this collaboration as approaching very beneficial for novices and as moderately beneficial or above for mentor candidates. There were no significant differences in the Likert-type ratings of novices across all three years (2009, 2010, 2011). While increases between 2009 and both 2010 and 2011 were found in mentors' ratings of the effectiveness of their preparation for this model, mentors rated their preparation as below moderately effective in all three years. There was also a significant increase between 2009 and 2011 in mentors' perceptions of how beneficial engaging in collaboration during and after teaching was for mentors. Between-group ANOVAs revealed that the increases in mentors' perceptions between years of implementation were attributable to the novice experience, with mentors who first had the novice experience in this model rating their preparation effectiveness and the benefits of collaboration for mentors higher than those who lacked the novice experience. Significant differences were also found in the ratings of novices and mentors who were placed in a different classroom than their mentorship partners, with those placed in the same classroom as their partner reporting higher preparation effectiveness, frequency of collaboration and benefits for both novices and mentors. Importantly, Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficients (i.e.,  $r$ 's) revealed strong positive relationships between novice and mentor candidates' perceptions of the benefits of collaboration for themselves and their peer mentorship partners during participation in the peer mentorship practicum. Strong positive relationships were also found between how frequently respondents reported engaging in the collaborative activities and how beneficial they perceived these activities to be for both novices and mentors. Significantly, the correlation coefficients demonstrated that novice and mentor candidates who engaged in these experiences found that doing so was beneficial for both themselves and their novice/mentor partner.

Similarly, analysis of novice and mentor respondents' open-ended responses across all three years revealed the perception of most respondents that the additional support provided by engaging in the recommended collaborative activities was beneficial to both partners. Additionally, many participants perceived that working with their mentorship partner made them comfortable enough to place themselves in a vulnerable position and ask their mentorship partner questions about teaching. Some mentors also perceived that peer mentorship fostered their abilities to consolidate their learning and develop their professional identities as teachers. Participants in all three years perceived the challenges of peer mentorship to include clarifying the redefined roles and responsibilities of mentor and novice candidates, changing perceptions of teaching from an independent to a collaborative practice, managing candidate compatibility, and engaging in collaborative practice in pairings where novice and mentor candidates were not placed in the same classroom. An additional challenge during 2009 and 2010 was a perception of inequity in the responses of mentor candidates who did not have the novice experience in this model. While this may be understandable, it is impossible to begin this model without a first cohort of mentors who lack the novice experience.

## Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion with traditional mentorship between these candidates and their hosting associate teacher holds the potential to foster field-based collaboration and provide additional support to both novice and mentor candidates. Equally important, the findings caution that the implementation of a practicum peer mentorship model requires careful attention to preparing candidates for this model by clarifying the roles of teacher candidates working as a dyad in their practicum placements. An implementation dip may also be anticipated when teacher candidates who lack the novice experience in this type of practicum model are required to take part in the model as mentor candidates. Furthermore, this study confirms the importance of collaboration with school-based partners in the development and implementation of innovative practicum models. This may enhance field-based support for the model and promote associate teachers' willingness to

host two candidates (i.e., a novice and a mentor), which will reduce the number of candidates who are unable to be placed in the same classroom as their mentorship peer partner. Collectively, this investigation illustrates that peer mentorship is a promising innovative practicum model that holds the potential to be beneficial to novice and mentor teacher candidates.



## Introduction

In teacher education programs, pre-service practicum placements are most commonly completed in classroom settings, with each teacher candidate (i.e., student teacher) placed individually to be mentored by an experienced associate teacher (i.e., hosting classroom teacher). This practicum model was intended to prepare candidates for independent classroom practice and has persisted for decades (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). However, there has been a significant shift over the past decade from independent to collaborative professional practice in education (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). Accordingly, to be responsive to this change, practicum placements must prepare teacher candidates for collaborative professional practice (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

This three-year study explored the experiences of candidates in a five-year concurrent teacher education program who participated in a peer mentorship practicum model. Specifically, candidates took part in a practicum model where teacher candidates were placed as a dyad, with each novice first-year candidate paired with a second- or third-year candidate who acted as a peer mentor. Ideally, the pair was then placed in the same classroom under the supervision of the same associate teacher. However, each year demographic constraints necessitated placing 5 to 8% of novices in another classroom in the same school as their mentor partner or in another school in close geographic proximity. This practicum model sought to combine mentorship between two teacher candidates at different stages of program completion with traditional mentorship between these candidates and their hosting associate teacher. In this program peer mentorship was a mandatory practicum model that replaced the traditional one-on-one placement of each teacher candidate with a different associate teacher. The objective of this practicum model was to foster collaborative practice between novice and mentor candidates, which was perceived to hold the potential to support both candidates.

A formal study was conducted during the first year the peer mentorship practicum model was implemented with all novice candidates (i.e., year one of this study). The first-year findings documented that teacher candidate participants perceived the practicum peer mentorship model to provide additional support, particularly for novice candidates (Grierson, Cantalini-Williams, Wideman-Johnston & Tedesco, 2011). To investigate the longitudinal effects of this alternative to the traditional model of placing each teacher candidate in an individual practicum placement, years two and three of this study were conducted with the financial support of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). The objectives of the study were:

- To explore the longitudinal benefits and challenges of combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these individual candidates and their hosting associate teachers;
- To explore any changes between years of implementation in teacher candidates' perceptions of the benefits and/or challenges of the peer mentorship practicum model;
- To explore the differences and similarities in the perceptions held by different cohort groups of teacher candidates of the benefits and challenges of the peer mentorship practicum model; and
- To explore the implications of this study for multi-year teacher education programs.

## Literature Review

There is little doubt that practicum placements are an integral component of teacher education (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006). Nonetheless, integrating university course-based and practicum field-based programming in teacher education, while responding to the evolving context of educational practice, presents many challenges for teacher educators (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006).

Over the past two decades, social constructivist theories of learning, characterized by the co-construction of new knowledge, have gained widespread acceptance in education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Fullan et al., 2006; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Social constructivism emphasizes the role of language and social interaction in promoting individuals' abilities to form connections between new information and existing networks of prior knowledge and construct representations through which they make sense of experiences and learn (Vygotsky, 1986; Wink & Putney, 2002). Furthermore, social constructivist theories posit that the learner's potential to acquire and apply new information is enhanced by working within their zone of proximal development, which is just beyond what they are able to do independently (Vygotsky, 1986; Wink & Putney, 2002). As a result, teaching has become a process of activating students' prior knowledge and scaffolding their construction of new understandings through collaborative learning experiences, with this process enhanced by social interaction with peers and scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable individuals (Bandura, 1986; Vygotsky, 1986; Wink & Putney, 2002).

Consistent with widespread acknowledgement that students construct their knowledge socially by collaborating and interacting with one another, the importance of teachers engaging in collaborative professional learning has been acknowledged widely (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Fullan et al., 2006; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). This has impacted teacher practitioners' professional learning opportunities. For example, instead of attending traditional one-day workshops provided by outside experts, many teachers are now expected to engage in professional learning through collaborative inquiry projects and classroom-based peer coaching, which includes co-planning and co-teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006; Knight, 2009). However, some teachers are resistant to sharing their private thoughts about how to teach and engaging in collaborative professional learning and/or practice, which has been attributed in part to long-held perceptions of teaching as an independent and autonomous activity rather than a collaborative practice (Fullan et al., 2006; Knight, 2009).

The shift to expectations of collaborative practice in education affects teacher candidates who enter their profession as "insiders" who have gained considerable, albeit naïve, understandings of teaching by spending thousands of hours in classrooms as students (Pajares, 1992). It is well established that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, because of the profound influence of their personal classroom experiences as students (Loughran, 2006; Pajares, 1992). While familiarity with the classroom context promotes initial confidence, the discovery that teaching is more difficult than it appears to be can quickly diminish teacher candidates' confidence as they begin to teach (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006).

By familiarizing a novice with their teaching role under the guidance of someone who is more experienced, mentorship programs can enhance the confidence and competence of teachers and transform a culture of isolation into one of collaboration (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Fullan et al., 2006). Consequently, in-service mentorship programs between practicing teachers are advocated commonly, and the value of mentorship between teacher candidates and experienced associate teachers is accepted widely (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006).

Mentorship programs for teacher candidates and beginning teachers have become common internationally (Hoban, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Hoban and colleagues (2009) reviewed 170 studies focused on mentorship programs for teacher candidates and recently qualified teachers. Their findings documented that mentoring had been shown to increase the confidence, self-reflection and problem-solving abilities of novices and their mentors. Additionally, it fostered collegial collaboration and led to a consolidation of mentors' professional identities. A drawback to mentoring was the potential for mentors to experience stress because of increased workloads attributed to meeting the needs of a novice. There was also a potential for novices to feel stress if they were incompatible with their mentor and/or perceived that they were being discouraged from using innovative teaching practices. This was particularly the case if the novice's teaching was to be evaluated by their mentor.

Hoban and colleagues (2009) concluded that successful mentorship programs required effective procedures

for selecting and pairing mentors, and contextual supports such as the preparation of mentors through exposure to mentoring strategies. Furthermore, they questioned whether there might be benefits to separating the mentorship of teacher candidates by an associate teacher from the assessment of candidates' teaching competence, as this evaluative relationship may affect teacher candidates' willingness to expose their vulnerability, ask questions and seek assistance. Additionally, the researchers cautioned that traditional mentorship between teacher candidates and associate teachers held the potential to reinforce long-standing approaches to teaching rather than encourage teacher candidates to implement inquiry-based collaborative learning practices that are now advocated widely.

In order to promote collaborative inquiry-based practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) recommended the development of reciprocal learning mentorship models in education. In contrast to traditional mentorship, in which the mentor is assumed to be more knowledgeable, reciprocal learning mentorship requires that novices and mentors engage in collaborative reflection and co-construct new understandings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Reciprocal learning mentorship programs are founded on the principles of interdependence, mutual respect, and the acknowledgment that novices and mentors will learn from and with one another through critical inquiry about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

Traditional mentorship between teacher candidates and experienced associate teachers was based on an expectation that this model would prepare candidates for independent classroom practice (Bullough et al., 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009). However, preparation for independent practice is inconsistent with recommendations that emphasize the importance of preparing candidates for reflective collaborative practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006). Moreover, Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) asserted that, to prepare future teachers for sustained commitment to collegial collaboration, field experiences in teacher education must promote reciprocity. More specifically, they recommended that field experiences foster interdependence and promote candidates' commitment to the belief that they "have an important role in providing personal and professional support to each other" (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008, p. 1808).

Promoting field-based reciprocity between candidates can be difficult when they complete traditional practicum placements individually in classrooms under the supervision of hosting associate teachers and university faculty supervisors, who share mentoring and evaluating responsibilities (Foster, Wimmer, Winter & Snart, 2010). While this model continues to be prevalent, dilemmas identified in perpetuating this "norm" include that it does not prepare candidates for the collegial collaboration that will be required in their professional environment (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008), as well as the potential disconnect between university coursework and practicum field experiences (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006). Lack of communication and collaboration between universities and their school-based partners may create situations where there is a lack of understanding of the practices advocated and implemented in each setting, which can result in candidates receiving "mixed messages," particularly during educational paradigm shifts (Foster et al., 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

Although some researchers recommend altering traditional teaching practicum models (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008), this is challenging for universities because there is insufficient evidence of the effectiveness of practicum models that differ from the traditional "norm" of individual field placements (Foster et al., 2010). Furthermore, implementing a new practicum model can be time-consuming because field-based partners should ideally be involved in collaboratively developing innovative practicum models with universities to enhance the potential for success (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010).

Reconceptualizing teacher education as a process of enculturation into supportive learning communities has led to small collaboratively developed pilot programs where dyads of teacher candidates at the same stage of program completion take part in shared practicum experiences (Bullough et al., 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005). Although relatively little research has explored this model, the findings of studies investigating these pilot programs have documented that participants perceived that engaging in practicum experiences with a partner at the same stage of BEd program completion enhanced collaboration, support and learning for both candidates (Bullough et al., 2003; Gardiner &

Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009). While potential drawbacks included candidate compatibility, competition, lack of freedom to innovate and/or enhanced dependency, researchers concluded that the benefits of shared practicum experiences outweighed the drawbacks (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005).

Although previous research had investigated the perceptions of teacher candidates at the same stage of program completion who took part in shared practicum experiences (Bullough et al., 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005), practicum peer mentorship between novice and more experienced teacher candidates had not been investigated. Additionally, previous research exploring shared practicum placements had focused on the experiences of small sample populations. Consequently, the benefits and challenges of implementing a peer mentorship practicum model with all candidates in a teacher education program had not been explored. This study addressed this void in the literature.

The findings from the first year of this investigation (see Grierson et al., 2011) documented that the majority of candidates perceived the peer mentorship practicum model to provide additional support through collegial collaboration, which enhanced their confidence and professional growth. Challenges included perceptions of inequity amongst the first cohort of mentors, teacher candidates adjusting to the paradigm shift of a shared practicum placement, which requires deviating from an understanding of teaching as an independent practice, and the program developing contextual supports to enhance role clarity and manage candidate compatibility. This study builds on the preliminary findings of Grierson et al., 2011.

## Research Questions

This three-year study explored the implementation of a peer mentorship practicum model in which all first-year teacher candidates in a concurrent BEd program participated as novices and most second- or third-year teacher candidates participated as mentors. The study sought to document the benefits and challenges of practicum peer mentorship between novice and more experienced teacher candidates and to explore whether the initial benefits and challenges of this practicum model were sustained or altered over a three-year period of implementation.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What were the benefits of combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these teacher candidates and their hosting associate teachers?
2. What were the challenges of combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these teacher candidates and their hosting associate teachers?
3. Were there any changes in cohorts of novice participants' perceptions of the peer mentorship practicum model between years of implementation?
4. Were there any changes in cohorts of mentor participants' perceptions of the peer mentorship practicum model between years of implementation?
5. Were there any variations in the perceptions of novice candidates and in the perceptions of mentor candidates that were attributable to their type of placement (i.e., same versus different classroom) or to their program of study?
6. Were there any variations in the perceptions of mentor candidates who participated in the peer

mentorship practicum model for one year and the perceptions of mentors who took part in the model for multiple years?

7. What was the relation between novice and mentor participants' perceptions of how beneficial the peer mentorship practicum model was and the frequency with which they reported engaging in the intended mentoring activities?

## Context

This study explored the experiences of candidates in a five-year concurrent teacher education program offered at a regional campus of an Ontario university. Candidates in this program pursue a Bachelor of Education (BEd) and an Honours Bachelor of Arts (BA) simultaneously.

The BEd program at this campus serves a total population of approximately 1,000 teacher candidates. The number of candidates in each program year from one through five ranges from 140 to 230. The vast majority of candidates (i.e., 98% or more) enter this program directly after completing high school. Consequently, most candidates in years one to three of the program who took part in the peer mentorship model were between 18 and 22 years of age. There is little diversity in race or gender within the teacher candidate population in this program. Most are Caucasian, of European Canadian origin, and approximately 94% are female.

The two concurrent BEd program options offered at this campus are preparation for teaching students in the primary and junior divisions (i.e., kindergarten to grade 6) and preparation for teaching students in the junior and intermediate divisions (i.e., grades 4 through 10). Approximately 65% of candidates pursue the primary/junior program and 35% the junior/intermediate program.

This BEd program was developed based on the belief that early and ongoing classroom practicum experiences would enhance teaching effectiveness. Consequently, candidates engage in practicum placements in each of the five program years. Candidates at the regional campus self-select the geographic setting of their practicum placements from 13 Ontario partner school boards located over a broad area.

The university practicum office recruits associate teachers willing to host candidates during their placements through the central school board office and/or school administrators in each of the 13 partner boards. The names of potential associate teachers are forwarded to the practicum office by each school board. There is little direct face-to-face communication between the university and individual hosting associate teachers, except through faculty advisors assigned to guide and/or evaluate teacher candidates. Most practicum information is communicated to associate teachers by their school board administrators and/or via printed material from the university that is mailed or hand delivered by their assigned teacher candidates.

Each first-year teacher candidate in this BEd program has a practicum placement in an Ontario classroom each Monday from mid-January through to the end of March, for a total of ten single days, followed by one full week in April, for a total of 15 days. Candidates in years two and three have a practicum placement in an Ontario classroom each Monday (excluding exam periods) from mid-October through to March, for a total of 15 single days, followed by one full week in April, for a total of 20 days per annum. Fourth-year candidates in this program participate in a self-selected service learning practicum for 20 days over the course of the year, and fifth-year candidates participate in two four-week placements in Ontario schools.

There is no course or professional seminar in this BEd program that is linked directly with the practicum. However, all candidates take a 24-hour (i.e., 2 hours per week for 12 weeks) curriculum methods course in the fall semester in each of years one through three, for a total of 72 hours in this three-part course. Primary/junior and junior/intermediate program candidates take separate curriculum methods courses, with different instructors for each. *The Practicum Handbook* is one of the required texts in all three parts of the curriculum methods course.



The curriculum methods course focuses on planning and organizing for instruction, and is more closely aligned with the practicum than are other courses in this BEd program. Topics covered in curriculum methods include developing lesson and unit plans, assessment and evaluation of student learning, classroom management, and how to provide differentiated learning experiences for students with diverse needs and interests.

As the curriculum methods courses are scheduled in the fall term and the peer mentorship practicum is implemented in the winter term, teacher candidates' practicum experiences are not supported during this course. Rather, faculty advisors assigned to mentor and/or evaluate candidates during their practicum placements provide university support during the peer mentorship practicum.

### **Development of the Peer Mentorship Practicum Model**

The peer mentorship practicum model was developed to provide first-year teacher candidates with opportunities to work collaboratively with the support of a second- or third-year candidate who was perceived to be a more experienced other within the novice's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986). It sought to foster collaborative practice between two teacher candidates in the practicum setting. The peer mentorship model also drew on Bandura's (1986) theory of observational learning and sought to enhance candidates' self-perceptions of teaching competence by providing vicarious experiences watching teaching modeled by a peer. Vicarious experiences increase in saliency when the observer identifies closely with the skills and context of the individual observed (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, having candidates observe one another teach in the same classroom may positively impact the efficacy of both teacher candidates.

Practicum peer mentorship was intended to foster collaborative practice among teacher candidates. In part, the suggested activities were based on the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), which provides for the mentoring of first-year teachers by experienced Ontario teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). In keeping with many of the suggested NTIP experiences, recommended peer mentorship activities included classroom observations, collaborative lesson planning, team teaching, planning for differentiated instruction and assessment of student learning, collaborative reflection, and professional dialogue about classroom management, as well as how to meet the expectations of associate teachers and the BEd program.

Dyads placed in the same classroom were asked to meet for thirty minutes per practicum day to review lessons, co-plan, share observations and reflect on new learning, with their associate teachers participating in these meetings when possible. Importantly, teacher candidates were expected to be non-evaluative in their interactions with each other. In keeping with past practices, associate teachers and university faculty advisors shared responsibilities for the assessment of teacher candidates' teaching.

This peer mentorship model began as a small pilot initiative. An overview of the pilot initiative is presented next, followed by the steps taken during full implementation of the model.

### ***Pilot Peer Mentorship Practicum Model***

In 2007-2008, the year prior to the first year of this study, a pilot practicum peer mentorship initiative was implemented. Seventeen pairings of novice first-year and mentor third-year teacher candidates were placed as dyads in the same practicum classrooms. All pairings were located in the same school, where the peer mentorship practicum model was developed collaboratively with the principal, who requested that all seventeen staff members participate as associate teachers, as she perceived that hosting candidates participating in the peer mentorship practicum model held the potential to provide increased support for students.

Analysis of the perceptions of participating teacher candidates and associate teachers gathered during focus

group sessions revealed the strength of the pilot initiative to be the opportunities for collaborative practice, which were perceived to foster the growth of both teacher candidates. Additionally, associate teachers perceived that hosting a dyad of teacher candidates provided increased individualized support for their students. Challenges included associate teachers' lack of clarity with respect to the differentiated expectations of novice and mentor candidates, and mentors' perceptions of the additional time and effort required to assist the novice. As the benefits of the pilot initiative were perceived to outweigh the challenges, the regional campus decided to implement a peer mentorship practicum model for all novice candidates who entered the BEd program the following year.

### *Full Implementation of the Peer Mentorship Practicum Model*

In the first year of full implementation (2008-2009) and in each year thereafter, all first-year candidates were allocated a mentor. Pairings were determined primarily on the basis of requests for placements in the same geographic area or school board. As the number of teacher candidates in each year of the BEd program differed and/or the school board or geographic area that candidates requested for their practicum differed, it was not possible to follow the protocol of the pilot initiative and place each novice first-year candidate with a mentor third-year candidate. Accordingly, the mentor group was comprised of both second-year candidates (with four weeks of practicum experience) and third-year candidates (with eight weeks of practicum experience) in each year of full implementation of the peer mentorship model. Additionally, due to geographic constraints and/or a lack of associate teachers in some locations who were willing to host two candidates (i.e., a novice and a mentor), each year between 16 and 20 novice candidates were not assigned mentors in the same classrooms. In these instances, novices were assigned mentor candidates placed in another classroom in the same school or in a different school in close geographic proximity. While this was not the ideal placement protocol, it was decided to be preferable to not engaging in the peer mentorship practicum model.

Prior to the full implementation of the peer mentorship practicum model in 2008-2009, all first-year, second-year and third-year teacher candidates began their placements in mid-October and completed a total of 20 practicum days per annum. However, when the mentorship model was implemented with all novice candidates, in order to differentiate the roles of the two teacher candidates in each mentorship dyad, mentors began their practicum in mid-October, with novices commencing at the beginning of the second term in mid-January. This change from the pilot peer mentorship initiative was intended to clearly delineate for associate teachers the roles of mentors and novices, as well as to provide mentor teacher candidates with opportunities to develop understandings of the classroom context in preparation for supporting the novice.

Concurrent with eliminating practicum teaching for novice candidates during the first term, the number of evaluations they would receive from associate teachers in their first year was reduced from two (one each term) to one in the second term when they took part in their practicum. Additionally, though related to overall budgetary constraints and alignment with concurrent education programs offered at the main campus rather than to peer mentorship per se, the evaluation of first-year BEd candidates by university faculty advisors was discontinued the same year that peer mentorship was implemented with all novices (2008-2009).

The practicum evaluation forms for first-year candidates were revised to include two items related to mentorship: "participates and works collaboratively with mentor on planning, implementing and assessing" and "recognizes and reflects on the importance of mentorship." To maintain consistency with the forms used on the main campus, where peer mentorship was not implemented, the practicum evaluation criteria for year two and three mentors were not modified. However, faculty advisors were encouraged to consider mentorship in evaluating mentors in the rated criterion "collaborates with others to create a learning community."

In attempts to garner the support of school board partners, the objectives of the peer mentorship model and the results of the pilot initiative were discussed in all face-to-face meetings about the practicum held with school board administrators in the 13 partner boards. Additionally, the rationale for this model was explained

in correspondence soliciting associate teachers willing to host two teacher candidates (i.e., a novice and a mentor).

*The Practicum Handbook* provided to all teacher candidates and associate teachers was revised to include an overview of the peer mentorship model. The expectation for novice and mentor candidates to learn from and with one another, with guidance from their associate teacher and university faculty advisor, was outlined. The objectives of providing additional support and fostering collaboration between candidates were summarized, as were the expectations for candidates to collaboratively plan and implement lessons, assess student learning and engage in collaborative reflection.

In 2008-2009, *The Practicum Handbook* specified that novice candidates were expected to co-plan and co-teach one lesson with their mentor by the end of January. Their involvement in co-teaching and in teaching independently was to increase gradually throughout the term, with the expectation that they would teach one lesson per practicum day by April. In keeping with past practices, mentors were expected to teach two lessons per day, with some lessons to be co-planned and co-taught with their novice partner. Associate teachers' roles were outlined in the handbook as facilitating the mentorship learning experience and guiding the mentor/novice dyad in co-planning and co-teaching.

The implementation of the peer mentorship practicum model was discussed during a regional campus faculty meeting at the onset of the 2008-2009 academic year, at which time it was recommended that all curriculum methods course instructors in year one, two and three of the program include an increased emphasis on mentorship. In addition to focusing on the information included in *The Practicum Handbook*, it was recommended that instructors devote instructional time to strategies for collaborative practice, with particular attention to co-planning and co-teaching. The peer mentorship model was also discussed during a meeting with all university faculty advisors responsible for supervising novice and mentor candidates' practicum experiences, and the expectations as outlined in *The Practicum Handbook* were reviewed. To prepare candidates for their roles, a half-day workshop was held in early January, immediately prior to the onset of their practicum, for all candidates participating in peer mentorship.

### Mentorship Workshop

The workshop began with a large group presentation during which the rationale for practicum peer mentorship was outlined, together with the expectations for teacher practitioners to engage in collaborative professional learning. While it was acknowledged that mentor candidates were slightly more experienced and could therefore support their novice partner, the expectation for reciprocity (i.e., both candidates would learn from and with one another) was also made explicit.

It was recommended that dyads placed in the same classroom meet for thirty minutes per practicum day to review lessons, co-plan, share observations and reflect on new learning, with the associate teachers participating in these meetings if possible. Candidates in mentorship dyads were encouraged to provide one another with thoughtful, non-evaluative feedback for professional growth. It was also stressed that teaching went beyond independently directing student learning from the front of the classroom to include working together to collaboratively support student learning, and working with individual students and/or small groups of students.

Consistent with the pilot initiative, the intended peer mentoring experiences were outlined to include assisting one another with meeting the expectations of the hosting associate teacher, gathering and sharing classroom observations, engaging in collaborative planning, co-teaching, providing differentiated student learning experiences, assessing student learning, and engaging in collaborative reflection. Candidates were encouraged to capitalize on the strengths of their partner in teaching specific subject areas (e.g., music, science). Additionally, the potential roles that partners could assume in co-teaching were explored (e.g., gathering and recording student responses, assisting small groups or individuals). Teacher candidates who had taken part in the peer mentorship model in the past year as novices and mentors were invited to share



their experiences and respond to questions posed by teacher candidates attending the workshop.

Novice and mentor partners met with one another during the second half of the workshop and used questionnaires to focus their one-on-one discussions. Mentors shared information about their practicum settings (e.g., classroom management strategies, student needs) and partners were encouraged to share their own strengths, needs and interests as teacher candidates and explore how they might work as a dyad to build on their strengths and overcome challenges.

While the overall framework of the mentorship workshop remained consistent over the three years of this study, more time was devoted each year to exploring the roles candidates could take on in supporting one another through co-planning and co-teaching. Additionally, more time was devoted to exploring how partners placed in different classrooms could support each other (e.g., visiting one another's placement settings). Each year, the PowerPoint presentation used during the mentorship workshop was posted on the university website for future reference.

### *Modifications in Implementation Years Two and Three*

In 2009-2010 and again in 2010-2011, the roles of associate teachers, novice candidates and mentor candidates in this model were expanded and clarified further in *The Practicum Handbook*. In addition to facilitating the mentorship learning experience, the expectation for associate teachers to provide both independent and co-teaching opportunities for mentors and novices was outlined. In addition to co-planning and co-teaching, the expectations for novices and mentors to observe one another, provide feedback and engage in collaborative reflection were also outlined. Consistent with the 2008-2009 *Handbook*, novices were expected to gradually increase their involvement in co-teaching and teach one lesson per day by the end of their practicum. Mentors were to teach two lessons per day, with some lessons co-taught with their novice partner. However, the number of lessons to be co-taught remained undefined.

The findings of the first year of this study were also summarized in the 2010-2011 *Practicum Handbook*. Additionally, the first-year findings were explored during a January 2011 meeting with all faculty advisors responsible for supervising candidates in the mentorship model.

## Methods

This study received ethics clearance. Pre- and post-practicum surveys were used to solicit teacher candidates' ratings using a five-point Likert-type scale and their open-ended responses to questions about their experiences in the peer mentorship practicum model.

### Participants

Teacher candidates were invited to participate in this study in each year that they took part in the peer mentorship model as a novice and/or as a mentor. No incentives for participation were offered. During participant recruitment, survey completion was presented as an opportunity to provide feedback that would be used to improve the peer mentorship practicum model in subsequent years.

In early January 2009, 2010 and 2011, and in late April 2009, 2010 and 2011, all potential participants were emailed an invitation to complete an electronic survey within a two-week time period. An email reminder inviting them to do so was also sent one week later. Each year, all candidates participating in the peer mentorship model were invited to complete the post-practicum survey, irrespective of whether they had completed the pre-practicum survey.

To ensure that candidates did not feel pressured to take part in this study, a research assistant conducted participant recruitment. Anonymity was assured, with all responses returned to the research assistant, who had signed a confidentiality agreement. In clustering responses by participant pool (e.g., novice, year two mentor), the research assistant stripped the open-ended response data of any identifying information (e.g., names of candidates or associate teachers).

Tables 1, 2 and 3 outline the number of candidates in each participant pool invited to take part in the study each year and the number who completed each survey. Although the sample population placed in a different classroom than their mentorship partner was small, as the results of this study were intended to inform refinement of the peer mentorship model, this group was surveyed to explore the benefits and challenges of this particular type of pairing.

**Table 1: 2009 Participants**

	Total Potential Participants	January Pre-Practicum Respondents		April Post-Practicum Respondents	
		Number	Response Rate %	Number	Response Rate %
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Same Classroom	211	68	32	70	33
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Different Classroom	16	3	19	6	37
Year 2 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	104	42	40	40	38
Year 3 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	107	41	38	44	41
Year 2 and 3 Mentors with Novice in Different Classroom	16	6	37	6	37

**Table 2: 2010 Participants**

	Total Potential Participants	January Pre-Practicum Respondents		April Post-Practicum Respondents	
		Number	Response Rate %	Number	Response Rate %
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Same Classroom	173	74	43	72	42
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Different Classroom	14	1	7	3	21
Year 2 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	143	77	54	76	53
Year 3 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	30	16	53	12	40
Year 2 and 3 Mentors with Novice in Different Classroom	14	7	50	6	43

**Table 3: 2011 Participants**

	Total Potential Participants	January Pre-Practicum Respondents		April Post-Practicum Respondents	
		Number	Response Rate %	Number	Response Rate %
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Same Classroom	220	NIL	NIL	83	38
Year 1 Novices with Mentor in Different Classroom	20	NIL	NIL	12	60
Year 2 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	142	86	60	60	42
Year 3 Mentors with Novice in Same Classroom	78	34	44	27	35
Year 2 and 3 Mentors with Novice in Different Classroom	20	8	40	6	30

Unfortunately, as a result of an error in the distribution of email invitations, novice participants were not recruited to take part in the study in January 2011. Consequently, no pre-practicum survey data were collected from 2011 novices.

### Data Sources

Data were gathered through responses to six electronic surveys, two in each year of the study. The online survey tool Zoomerang was used for each survey. Each email invitation to participate in this study included a link to the pre- or post-practicum survey instrument (both included as Appendix A). The pre-practicum surveys were completed at the onset of participation in the peer mentorship practicum model in early January and the post-practicum surveys completed four months later at the conclusion of participation in peer mentorship. The survey was designed to assess candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the methods intended to prepare them for the peer mentorship model, their frequency of engagement in the recommended peer mentorship experiences, their perceptions of the benefits of the mentorship experiences for themselves and for their peer mentorship partners, and their perceptions of the overall benefits and drawbacks of this practicum model. Neither survey was field-tested.

In completing the pre-practicum surveys, novices and mentors used a five-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1=not at all, 2=minimally, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=highly) to rate their perceptions of how prepared they felt for their novice/mentor role, the effectiveness of each method that was intended to prepare them for their role, as well as how beneficial they perceived the peer mentorship practicum model would be for novices, mentors and associate teachers. The post-practicum surveys asked participants to use a five-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=usually, 5=consistently) to rate the frequency with which they engaged in each of the intended collaborative mentorship activities with their partner and a five-point scale (i.e., 1=not at all, 2=minimally, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=highly) to rate how beneficial engaging in each of these activities was for novices and for mentors. The eight intended activities included responding to the expectations of the BEd program (e.g., practicum binder organization), responding to the expectations of their hosting associate teacher, lesson planning, team teaching, classroom management, providing differentiated instruction, assessing student learning and engaging in collaborative reflection. Additionally, participants used a five-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1=not at all, 2=minimally, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=highly) to rate how prepared they felt for their peer mentorship practicum role and the effectiveness of each approach implemented to prepare them for their role. The five role preparation approaches each year included a mentorship workshop, exploration of mentorship during curriculum methods courses, information about peer mentorship in *The Practicum Handbook*, information about peer mentorship on the university website and testimonials from past

peer mentorship participants.

To solicit novice and mentor participants' perceptions of the factors that affected their peer mentorship experiences and to provide them with an opportunity to include information not addressed through the Likert-type questions, the pre- and post-practicum surveys included the following four open-ended items:

1. Comment on the effectiveness of the strategies used to prepare you for your role in the mentorship program.
2. Please describe the strengths of the concurrent BEd mentorship program.
3. Please describe any aspects of the concurrent BEd mentorship program that require improvement and suggest alternative changes.
4. Do you have any additional comments about the concurrent BEd mentorship program that you would like to make?

The use of an expandable textbox following each open-ended item enabled participants to determine the length of their responses. The answers that respondents provided to each item ranged in length from a single phrase or sentence to a full page of text.

## Data Analysis

### *Quantitative Analysis*

All quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) were computed for participants' responses to the individual Likert-type survey questions. The mean response to each survey question in each year is included as Appendix B.

Analysis of the variance in participants' response patterns focused only on the post-practicum data. As the post-practicum questionnaire contained 29 items, individual analyses of each question would result in an increased likelihood of type I error (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007; Parker & Szymanski, 1992). Therefore, continuous scales combining related individual items were developed to investigate participants' Likert-type responses (see Appendix C).

### *Scale Development*

Using 29 questions asked on the post-practicum survey, four overall scales were developed that combined groups of items related to preparation effectiveness (5 items; range of potential scores 5 to 25), the frequency with which respondents reported engaging in the recommended collaborative peer mentorship experiences (8 items; range of potential scores 8 to 40), perceptions of how beneficial these experiences were for novices (8 items; range of potential scores 8 to 40), and perceptions of how beneficial these experiences were for mentors (8 items; range of potential scores 8 to 40).

To provide for more detailed analysis, sub-scales were developed to separate the items included in overall scales 2 to 4 by their occurrence in the teaching cycle. The sub-scales separated items related to collaboration that occurred before teaching lessons (3 items; range of potential scores 3 to 15), during teaching lessons (3 items; range of potential scores 3 to 15), and after teaching lessons (2 items; range of

potential scores 2 to 10). Cronbach's alpha was used to investigate the 13 scales and all showed internal consistency above an acceptable alpha level of .75 (see Appendix C).

## Analysis Methods

The variance in mean response patterns within participant groups (i.e., novices, mentors) over time (i.e., 2009, 2010, 2011) and between different groups of participants (e.g., pairings in same versus different classrooms) were explored by conducting analysis of variance (ANOVA).

As all scales showed acceptable internal consistency, items were combined and the overall scales 1 to 4 were investigated. Because scales 5 to 13 are sub-scales of the overall scales 2 to 4 and to reduce the number of analyses, scales 5 to 13 were investigated only if significant results were found on the corresponding overall scale (2 to 4). For example, if significant results were found on *Beneficial for Novice* (scale 3), then further investigation of the potential reasons for these differences was conducted by exploring the individual aspects of the scale, which included *Beneficial for Novice: Collaboration before Teaching* (sub-scale 8), *Beneficial for Novice: Collaboration during Teaching* (sub-scale 9) and *Beneficial for Novice: Collaboration after Teaching* (sub-scale 10).

Additionally, Pearson's bivariate correlations (i.e.,  $r$ 's) were computed to assess the linear relationship between two interval variables. For instance, Pearson  $r$ 's were calculated to measure the relationship between mentor participants' perceptions of the benefits of participating in the mentorship model for themselves (i.e., *Beneficial for Mentor* – scale 4) and for their novice partners (i.e., *Beneficial for Novice* – scale 3). Scores on Pearson's  $r$ 's can range between -1 and +1, with a score of 0 indicating no relationship, +1 the highest positive relationship score and -1 the lowest negative relationship score.

## Sampling Confounds

As all survey data, including candidate years and roles, were self-reported, there is the potential for error in each participant pool as candidates may have incorrectly indicated their own program year and/or that of their mentorship partner. Where errors were apparent (e.g., reporting the same program year for respondent and partner), responses were excluded. Responses removed for the quantitative analyses included 7 in 2009, 6 in 2010 and 8 in 2011.

There was no requirement to provide a response to each survey question and some participants did not respond to all of the questions. Participants included in each analysis provided responses to all questions in the overall scale or sub-scale investigated. Additionally, sub-scales 5 to 13 were investigated only if there were statistically significant results obtained through investigation of the overall scales 2 to 4. Therefore, it is possible that group differences may be found when exploring sub-scales for non-significant overall scales. However, as conducting many analyses will result in error, the number of analyses was limited to reduce the risk of error.

Participants were invited to take part in this study each year they were a novice or a mentor in the practicum peer mentorship model. While some participants completed the same questionnaires at multiple time points (e.g., first as a novice, then twice as a mentor), others completed the survey at only one time point. While it is possible that relationships between differing years of study may be due to repeated participants, the sample population which completed the survey at one time point only may include those who took part in the peer mentorship model over multiple years without participating in the study each year. Therefore, a decision was made not to investigate shared variance over time through analyses of repeated measures comparing those who participated in more than one time period and to treat the analysis as cross-sectional and assume a normal distribution of the population, as is conventional.

## Open-Ended Response Analysis

Each of the six data sets (pre-practicum and post-practicum open-ended responses in each of 2009, 2010 and 2011) was divided into three groups: year one novices, year two mentors and year three mentors. Each group was further sub-divided into respondents placed in the same classroom and respondents placed in a different classroom than their mentorship partner.

The open-ended response data collected through each survey were analyzed by coding and categorizing of key idea units as described by Creswell (2009). To enhance the credibility of the findings, all data were first coded independently by two researchers, who then met to negotiate a shared understanding, with any disagreements resolved through discussion to consensus (Creswell, 2009). The coded idea units were then collapsed into categorical clusters and themes representing participants' perceptions.

To compare and contrast the open-ended response patterns of participants in each group (e.g., novices, mentors, same classroom placement, different classroom placement) in each year (2009, 2010, 2011), the number of respondents in each group who mentioned each theme and sub-theme was tallied and entered into a matrix. If a respondent made more than one comment representative of a theme, it was counted only once to ensure that the number of respondents who had common perceptions was reflected accurately.

## Limitations

Demographic data gathered through the surveys were limited to each participant's program (i.e., primary/junior or junior/intermediate) and year in the BEd program. While there is little diversity in the teacher candidate population in this program, the results of this study may differ in a context where the teacher candidate population is more diverse.

Because survey completion was voluntary, the responses of teacher candidates who elected to participate in this study in any year may not be typical of their cohort group (e.g., novices, mentors) as a whole. The potential for this to affect the results is reduced by the large data set collected over each of three consecutive years (2009, 2010, 2011). Additionally, the small sample population placed in a different class than their mentorship partner may have diminished the reliability of the results obtained through analysis of the responses of this group.

## Quantitative Results

A full description of each analysis conducted is included in Appendix D. This section provides an overview and details the most salient results. As detailed in Appendix C, the number of items and range of potential scores in each scale and sub-scale varies. Potential scores in *Preparation Effectiveness* (scale 1) range from a low of 5 to a high of 25. Possible scores in *Frequency of Collaboration* (scale 2), *Beneficial for Novice* (scale 3), and *Beneficial for Mentor* (scale 4) range from a low of 8 to a high of 40. The range of possible scores is from a low of 3 to a high of 15 in the *Collaboration before Teaching* sub-scales (i.e., sub-scales 5, 8, 11) and from a low of 3 to a high of 15 in the *Collaboration during Teaching* sub-scales (i.e., sub-scales 6, 9, 12). Scores can range from a low of 2 to a high of 10 in the *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scales (i.e., sub-scales 7, 10, 13).

## Preliminary Analyses: Within-Group Comparisons

The first goal of the quantitative analyses was to determine whether any statistically significant differences existed in the mean responses provided by mentor participants in different years (i.e., 2009, 2010, 2011) and in the mean responses of novice participants across years. If no differences were revealed, the three groups



of mentors and three groups of novices could be combined into one group of novices and one group of mentors for further investigation

### Mentors

The responses of mentors in 2009, 2010 and 2011 to scales 1 through 4 were compared and statistically significant differences were found for two scales: *Preparation Effectiveness* ( $F(2, 263) = 6.31, p < .01$ ) and *Beneficial for Mentor*, ( $F(2, 255) = 3.02, p = .05$ ).

**Table 4: Mean Response Overall Scales 1-4**

Scale	2009 (n=85)		2010 (n=92)		2011 (n=89)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Preparation Effectiveness	13.17 <sup>ab</sup>	3.69	14.92 <sup>a</sup>	3.76	14.77 <sup>b</sup>	3.39
2. Frequency of Collaboration	28.46	6.94	29.38	7.32	29.00	7.16
3. Beneficial for Novice	30.62	7.07	31.62	6.62	31.11	7.49
4. Beneficial for Mentor	25.13 <sup>c</sup>	8.31	27.17	8.37	28.14 <sup>c</sup>	7.53

Significant group differences are denoted by the same superscript in each row

<sup>a</sup>  $p < .01$ , <sup>b</sup>  $p < .05$ , <sup>c</sup>  $p = .056$

As outlined in Table 4, the differences for *Preparation Effectiveness* were between 2009 and 2010, as well as between 2009 and 2011. While there was a significant improvement in perceptions of preparation in years 2010 and 2011 compared to 2009, it is important to note that mentors rated their preparation as below moderately effective (i.e., 15) in all three years.

The five items in the *Preparation Effectiveness* scale were a mentorship workshop provided each year, exploration of mentorship during curriculum methods courses, information about peer mentorship in *The Practicum Handbook*, information about peer mentorship on the university website, and testimonials from past practicum peer mentorship participants. With 2010 and 2011 participants reporting more preparation effectiveness than 2009 respondents, mentors' increased perceptions of preparation effectiveness may be attributable in part to the expanded information in *The Practicum Handbook*, increased focus on mentorship during curriculum methods courses, and/or changes in the mentorship workshop. Alternatively, mentors' increased self-perceptions of preparation may be attributable to the effect of taking part in peer mentorship for more than one year. This may be particularly so for the 2011 results because all 2011 mentors were novices in this practicum model in either 2009 or 2010.

As can be seen in Table 4, mentors across all years reported the mean frequency with which they engaged in the intended collaborative activities as moderate; that is, midway between sometimes (i.e., 24) and usually (i.e., 32). Importantly, each year mentors rated these collaborative activities as approaching very beneficial (i.e., 32) for their novice partners and moderately beneficial (i.e., 24) for themselves. There was also a marginally significant difference between 2009 and 2011 mentor responses on overall scale 4, *Beneficial for Mentor*. To understand why there may be differences between the three years, the three sub-scales (i.e., 11, 12, 13) that encompass the *Beneficial for Mentor* scale were investigated. As outlined in Table 5, the results indicated no significant difference between years of response on the *Collaboration before Teaching* sub-scale. Conversely, significant group differences were found between year 2009 and 2011 in the *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scale and, although marginal, differences were noted in the *Collaboration during Teaching* sub-scale. Notably, all groups reported moderate collaboration scores for these subscales at each time point.

**Table 5: Mean Response Beneficial for Mentor Sub-Scales 11-13**

Sub-Scale of Beneficial Mentor	2009 (n=85)		2010 (n=92)		2011 (n=89)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
11. Collaboration before Teaching	7.49	3.12	10.12	3.31	10.33	2.94
12. Collaboration during Teaching	9.67**	3.33	10.35	3.29	10.87**	2.86
13. Collaboration after Teaching	6.00*	2.3	6.58	2.15	6.93*	2.10

\*  $F(2, 257) = 3.91, p < .05$ ; \*\*  $F(2, 257) = 3.06, p = .05$

As the difference in mean responses of mentors in 2009 and 2011 on the *Beneficial for Mentor* scale and the *Collaboration during Teaching* (i.e., classroom management, differentiated instruction, teach teaming) sub-scale are marginal, it is unknown whether or not there are reliable group differences so caution should be taken when interpreting these findings.

The variance in mean scores on the *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scale (i.e., assessment/evaluation, reflection) may be noteworthy. Whereas no 2009 mentors took part in this model as novices, some of the 2010 mentors had the novice experience in this model and all of the 2011 mentors were novices in 2009 or in 2010. Consequently, the increase between 2009 and 2011 mentors' perceptions of the benefit of collaboration after teaching may be attributable to cumulative participation in the peer mentorship model.

The responses of mentor participants were next compared to determine whether the mean scores differed based on their year of study in the BEd program (i.e., year two or year three). No statistically significant differences were found. Therefore, mentors' ratings were not impacted by whether mentors were second-year or third-year teacher candidates.

### Novices

The responses of novices in 2009, 2010 and 2011 on scales 1 through 4 were compared; no significant differences were found. Additionally, to ascertain whether the mentor's year in the BEd program impacted novices' ratings, the responses of novices paired with a mentor in year two were compared to the responses of novices paired with a mentor in year three for scales 1 through 4. No significant differences were found in novice responses based on the year of study and/or year of mentor. Accordingly, novices' responses were not impacted by the year that they took part in peer mentorship or by whether their mentor was a year two or three BEd candidate.

### Between-Group Comparisons

Based on the results of the within-group analyses that indicated no mean differences based on respondents' year of participation, novices across the three years with either year two or year three mentors were combined into one group for the between-group comparisons. Similarly, where no differences between years of participation were found in mentors' responses, mentors were combined into one group. However, since the year of response was related to scores on the *Preparation Effectiveness* scale and on the *Beneficial for Mentor: Collaboration during Teaching* and *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scales, these scales were not investigated in most of the between-group comparisons to reduce the potential for the year of response confounding the results.

The between-group analyses compared placement and program characteristics to explore whether these were related to outcomes. Specifically, comparisons were conducted to explore whether participants' responses were related to their placement in the same or in a different classroom than their mentorship partner or to their program of study (i.e., preparing to teach in the primary/junior or junior/intermediate divisions). Additionally, the responses of mentors who took part in the peer mentorship model for one, two and three years were compared. Finally, to determine the impact of the novice experience on mentors'



perceptions, the responses of mentors who had the novice experience were compared with the responses of mentors who lacked the novice experience in this model.

### *Same versus Different Classroom Placement*

To determine whether the type of classroom placement impacted outcomes, the mean responses of mentors and novices who were placed in the same and in different classrooms than their peer mentorship partners were compared.

#### **Mentors**

First, responses for mentors placed in the same and different classrooms than their novice partners were investigated. As outlined in Table 6, significant differences were found between the mean scores for *Frequency of Collaboration*, *Beneficial for Novice* and *Beneficial for Mentor* scales. Responses on all of these scales were higher for mentors placed in the same classroom compared to those placed in a different classroom than their novice partner.

**Table 6: Mentor: Mean Response Same Class vs. Different Class Placement**

Scale	Same (n=239)		Different (n=23)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2. Frequency of Collaboration	29.89	5.84	20.35	11.42
3. Beneficial for Novice	31.70	6.22	25.54	11.64
4. Beneficial for Mentor	27.28	7.75	22.33	10.89

$p < .01$

In an attempt to further understand group differences for each scale, exploration of the subscales was conducted and statistically significant differences were found between the groups on all subscales (all  $F$ 's 6.14 – 55.96, all  $p$ 's < .01). For all scales and sub-scales compared (see Appendix D), mentors placed in the same classroom as their novice partner reported significantly higher mean scores than those placed in different classrooms. There are a number of possible explanations for these differences. For example, although some of the recommended collaborative activities (e.g., practicum binder organization, lesson planning) could be undertaken when candidates were in different classrooms, many of the activities (e.g., team teaching, classroom management, differentiated instruction) were more easily accomplished when candidates worked in the same classroom with the same students. Easier access to their novice partner enabled mentors in the same classroom to engage in the recommended collaborative activities more frequently, and this in turn may have affected their perceptions of how beneficial these activities were for both novices and mentors.

#### **Novices**

Responses from novices placed in the same class and in a different class than their mentor were compared. Similar to the investigation above, mean scores of novice participants on all of the overall scales were significantly different (see Table 7; all  $F$ 's > 4.56, all  $p$ 's < .05). Further investigation revealed that mean scores on all of the sub-scales were also significantly different between the groups (all  $F$ 's < 17.89, all  $p$ 's < .001). For all scales and all sub-scales, novices placed in the same classroom as their mentor partner reported significantly higher mean scores than those placed in a different classroom than their mentor partner.

**Table 7: Novice: Mean Response Same Class vs. Different Class Placement**

Scale	Same (n=226)		Different (n=16)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Preparation Effectiveness	15.75	3.61	13.75	3.82
2. Frequency of Collaboration	29.12	7.28	13.81	8.57
3. Beneficial for Novice	31.58	7.13	20.87	11.31
4. Beneficial for Mentor	28.70	7.91	18.81	8.65

$p < .05$ ,  $p < .001$

In all years, the mean rating that novices who were placed in the same classroom as their mentor assigned to the effectiveness of the methods intended to prepare them for their role was in the moderate range (i.e., 15 from possible range of 5 to 25). Those placed in a different classroom than their mentor partner perceived they were less well prepared. This may be attributable to the primary focus of the methods intended to prepare novices (e.g., mentorship workshop) targeting same class mentorship pairings, which were most common.

In each year, novices placed in the same classroom as their peer mentor reported that they often engaged in the intended collaborative activities; their mean rating was between sometimes (i.e., 24) and usually (i.e., 32). Understandably, as outlined in Table 7, novices placed in a different classroom than their partner engaged in the recommended collaborative activities (e.g., collaborative planning, team teaching) significantly less frequently than those placed in the same room as their partner. Importantly, each year novices in the same classroom as their mentor rated engaging in these activities as approaching very beneficial (i.e., 32; range 8 to 40) for themselves and as above moderately beneficial (i.e., 24) for their peer mentor partners. Novices placed in a different classroom than their mentor rated the benefit of collaboration for themselves and for their mentor partner as significantly lower (i.e., between minimally (i.e., 16) and moderately (i.e., 24) beneficial).

The small sample of participants placed in a different classroom than their mentorship partner requires that caution be used when interpreting these results. However, the vast differences in mean scores in these analyses suggest that classroom placement may be noteworthy as a factor that impacted the responses of both novices and mentors, with greater benefits for both mentor and novice derived from being in the same versus a different classroom.

### *Primary/Junior Candidates versus Junior/Intermediate Program Candidates*

To determine whether or not the BEd program of mentors and novices impacted outcomes, the mean responses of participants in the primary/junior division of the BEd program and of participants in the junior/intermediate division were compared.

#### **Mentors**

The *Preparation Effectiveness* scale and the *Beneficial for Mentor: Collaboration during Teaching and Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scales were not compared, as the within-group analyses indicated that the mentor's year (i.e., 2009, 2010, 2011) impacted these responses. The mean responses of mentors in the primary/junior program were compared to the mean responses of those in the junior/intermediate program. There were no statistically significant differences in any of the scales compared.

#### **Novices**

The mean responses of novice participants in the primary/junior program ( $n=147$ ) and the mean response of novice participants in the junior/intermediate program ( $n=92$ ) were compared. The only significant mean score difference found was for *Preparation Effectiveness*, with primary/junior novice participants reporting that they

felt more prepared ( $M = 16.06$ ,  $SD = 3.22$ ) than junior/intermediate novices ( $M = 14.91$ ,  $SD = 4.17$ ), ( $F(1, 237) = 5.70$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

There are a number of potential explanations for the difference in preparation effectiveness. For example, while most methods intended to prepare participants for peer mentorship (e.g., workshops) were the same for all candidates, primary/junior and junior/intermediate BEd candidates take different curriculum methods courses. Accordingly, the increased perceptions of preparation effectiveness of the primary/junior participants may be attributable to the level of focus on mentorship during their curriculum methods courses. Alternatively, the difference may be attributable to factors unrelated to peer mentorship, such as the characteristics of candidates who select each program. Based on these results, it seems that being in the primary/junior or in the junior/intermediate program had minimal impact on the responses of mentors and novices.

### *Participation in One versus Multiple Years*

As noted earlier, there were some differences in the responses of mentors across years of implementation, and one possible reason for the variation in responses may be the cumulative effect of involvement in the mentorship model. The following analyses were conducted to explore this possible relationship. To determine whether or not the number of years participating in the model impacted the mentors' responses, the mean post-practicum response of mentors who participated in the peer mentorship model for one, two and three years were investigated. This comparison included the responses of participants who completed surveys at one time point only and as a mentor (i.e., in 2009, 2010 or 2011), the responses of participants who completed surveys in any two of the years 2009, 2010 and 2011, and the responses of participants who completed surveys in all three years.<sup>1</sup>

The one-year group was comprised of the responses of mentors who completed the survey only one time across all three years and as a mentor. The two-years group was comprised of the second year survey responses of mentors who completed surveys twice, either once as a novice and once as a mentor, or twice as a mentor. The three-years group was comprised of the third year survey responses of participants who completed surveys three times, as a novice in 2009, and as a mentor in both 2010 and 2011. As can be seen in Table 8, *Frequency of Collaboration* and *Beneficial for Mentor* mean scores differed between groups; therefore, the subscales of these two scales were explored.

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<sup>1</sup> A research assistant tracked repeated participants on the basis of respondent email addresses included in the raw data files.

**Table 8: Mentor Mean Response: Number of Years Mentorship Participation**

Scale	1 Year (n=139)		2 Years (n=95)		3 Years (n=30)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2. Frequency of Collaboration	28.03 <sup>a</sup>	7.63	29.49	6.20	31.53 <sup>a</sup>	6.89
3. Beneficial for Novice	30.39	7.48	31.60	6.24	33.11	7.34
4. Beneficial for Mentor	25.34 <sup>ab</sup>	8.45	28.08 <sup>a</sup>	7.08	29.75 <sup>b</sup>	8.67
5. Frequency of Collaboration before Teaching	11.14	2.90	11.56	2.41	12.10	2.69
6. Frequency of Collaboration during Teaching	10.27 <sup>a</sup>	3.15	11.00	2.65	11.83 <sup>a</sup>	2.73
7. Frequency of Collaboration after Teaching	6.63	2.10	6.97	1.87	7.60	1.79
11. Beneficial for Mentor Collaboration before Teaching	9.52	3.25	10.34	2.82	11.00	3.32
12. Beneficial for Mentor Collaboration during Teaching	9.63 <sup>ac</sup>	3.34	10.91 <sup>c</sup>	2.75	11.43 <sup>a</sup>	3.20
13. Beneficial for Mentor Collaboration after Teaching	6.14 <sup>a</sup>	2.29	6.80	2.00	7.31 <sup>a</sup>	2.21

<sup>a, b</sup>  $p < .05$ , <sup>c</sup>  $p < .01$

The results of these analyses are consistent with the preliminary analyses of mentors' experiences (Table 4 and Table 5) that indicated that the *Beneficial for Mentor* overall scale and the *Beneficial for Mentor Collaboration during Teaching* and *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scales were impacted by the mentor's year (i.e., 2009, 2010, 2011) in the practicum model. Mentor participants who took part in this practicum model for two or three years perceived that it was significantly more beneficial for mentors than did mentors who participated in this practicum model for only one year. This supports the conclusion that there were benefits to cumulative participation in this practicum model, whether a respondent was a novice participant one year and a mentor participant in a subsequent year, or repeated the mentor experience.

It is important to note that these are not three distinct participant groups. For example, if one individual was a mentor twice, his or her mean score for both years is included in the mean of the first-year survey in the one-year sample population and the mean of their second-year score included in the two-years sample population. As outlined in the sampling confounds, analyses of repeated measures comparing those who participated in more than one time period were not conducted to address shared variance over time.

Additionally, while this comparison supports that there are benefits to cumulative participation, it does not differentiate between the impact of being a novice in one year and being a mentor in a subsequent year, and the impact of repeating the mentor experience. For example, participants in the two-years group include those who were a novice in one year and a mentor in a subsequent year, and participants who repeated the mentor experience. Consequently, further analyses were conducted to investigate whether the novice experience in this model impacted the mentors' responses and explore whether the between group differences in the years of participation analyses (Table 8) were attributable to the novice experience in this model.

### *The Impact of the Novice Experience on Mentor Responses*

To explore whether the novice experience impacted mentors' responses, the responses of all mentors who did not have the novice experience (i.e., all 2009 mentors and 2010 year-three mentors) were compared to the responses of all mentors who were first novice participants in this practicum model (i.e., 2010 year-two mentors and all 2011 mentors). All scales were compared in these analyses. As outlined in Table 9, mean scores for *Preparation Effectiveness* and *Beneficial for Mentor* were significantly higher for mentors who had

the experience of being a novice compared to those who were never novices. The *Collaboration before Teaching*, *Collaboration during Teaching* and *Collaboration after Teaching* sub-scales of *Beneficial for Mentor* were investigated and significant differences were found on all three. There were no group differences on the *Frequency of Collaboration* and *Beneficial for Novice* scales.

**Table 9: Mentor Mean Response: With and Without the Novice Mentorship Experience**

Scale	Mentors Without Novice Experience (n=96)		Mentors With Novice Experience (n=170)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Preparation Effectiveness	13.14	3.76	14.97	3.49
2. Frequency of Collaboration	28.57	6.93	29.18	7.26
3. Beneficial for Novice	30.43	7.23	31.52	6.96
4. Beneficial for Mentor**	24.90	8.26	27.94	7.88
11. Beneficial for Mentor: Collaboration before Teaching***	9.43	3.12	10.30	3.12
12. Beneficial for Mentor: Collaboration during Teaching**	9.54	3.31	10.74	3.04
13. Beneficial for Mentor: Collaboration after Teaching**	5.96	2.28	6.82	2.11

$p < .001$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$

Compared to mentors who did not first have the novice experience, mentors with the novice experience reported that they were better prepared for this practicum model and that it was more beneficial for them as mentors to engage in the recommended collaborative activities. This suggests that the differences in mentor mean responses across years of participation in this model (Table 4 and Table 5) may be attributable to cumulative involvement in the peer mentorship practicum model. Interestingly, the ratings that mentors assigned to the *Frequency of Collaboration* were not impacted by whether a mentor was first a novice. Accordingly, the increase in *Frequency of Collaboration* reported in Table 8 may be attributable to repeating the mentor experience, rather than to having the novice experience in this model.

### Linear Relationships

To investigate whether or not there were relationships between participants' responses to multiple scales, Pearson's bivariate correlations (i.e.,  $r$ 's) were conducted within the novice and within the mentor groups. A relationship between two outcome measures may provide evidence that they are linked. These analyses were conducted to measure the linear relationship between the ratings that novice and mentor participants assigned to the benefits of participating in the peer mentorship practicum model for themselves and their mentorship partners (i.e., *Beneficial for Novice* scale and *Beneficial for Mentor* scale). Additionally, the relationships between participants' ratings on *Frequency of Collaboration* (scale 2) and *Beneficial for Mentor* (scale 4), and the relationship between mentor and novice participants' ratings on *Frequency of Collaboration* (scale 2) and *Beneficial for Novice* (scale 3), were explored. While the results in Table 10 indicate that novices reported a stronger relationship between the benefits to self and benefits to mentor than the mentors reported for this same relationship, both indicate strong positive relationships.

**Table 10: Relationships: Beneficial for Novice, Beneficial for Mentor and Frequency of Collaboration**

Two Scales Compared	Mentor Self-Report ( <i>n</i> =266)	Novice Self-Report ( <i>n</i> =239)
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Beneficial for Novice (scale 3) and Beneficial for Mentor (scale 4)	0.62*	0.80*
Frequency of Collaboration (scale 2) and Beneficial for Mentor (scale 4)	0.63*	0.74*
Frequency of Collaboration (scale 2) and Beneficial for Novice (scale 3)	0.71*	0.74*

\* $p < .001$

The relationships are also strong between the frequency with which novice and mentor participants reported engaging in the intended collaborative teaching experiences and the ratings that they assigned to how beneficial peer mentorship was for themselves and for their partner. These results indicate that there is a strong positive relationship between engaging in the intended collaborative mentorship experiences and perceiving the mentorship relationship to be beneficial to both self and novice/mentor partner. This suggests that if one partner in the mentorship dyad feels they are benefiting, they also see value in it for their peer mentorship partner. Importantly, if collaboration occurs more frequently, there is a belief amongst novices and amongst mentors that they and their partner are benefiting from this collaboration.

## Open-Ended Response Results

The following qualifiers are used when describing the results of the analyses of the open-ended response data. The word *most* is used when a theme was mentioned by 60% or more of respondents. *Many* is used when 40 to 59% of respondents mentioned a theme, *some* indicates that a theme was mentioned by 20 to 39% of respondents and *few* is used as a qualifier when a theme was mentioned by 19% of respondents or less. The results are presented in two categorical clusters, benefits and challenges, with the description of each theme identified within each category followed by representative participant quotes.

### Benefits

In all three years, the most frequently identified benefit was the perception of most novices and most mentors that the peer mentorship model provided additional support for both candidates. This result is consistent with the quantitative results. Moreover, the open-ended response results detailed next provide additional insight into the factors that impacted participants' Likert-type ratings. Specifically, novice and mentor participants attributed this support to engaging in the recommended collaborative activities, as well as to having the freedom to adopt an inquiry stance and ask questions without fear of reprisal. An additional theme identified in the open-ended responses of mentors was that engaging in peer mentorship enabled them to consolidate their learning and develop their professional identity.

### Collaborative Practice

Each year, most novice and mentor respondents identified the personal and professional support provided by engaging in collaborative practice as the greatest strength of the peer mentorship practicum model. Most of the recommended activities were cited as examples of how participants derived this support, with team teaching and collaborative lesson planning being mentioned most frequently.

*Team teaching in the beginning was also important and fun. My mentor was a great support and helped me through lesson plans and answered any of my questions. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*



*You really only understand the greatness of this program once you two are planning and teaching together; nothing really prepares you... team teaching just allows for lessons and ideas to expand exponentially. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

*The mentorship program was absolutely wonderful! I was placed in a classroom with my mentor and I cannot begin to list the many benefits of the program. I was able to see my mentor teach and understand what teaching is all about, and I had all the help I needed when it came to planning lessons and group activities. (Year 1 Novice, April 2010)*

*Learning from someone who is in your same position and learning from someone who has been teaching for years... does it get any better than that? (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

Although some 2009 and 2010 mentors stated in the post-practicum surveys that they held initial reservations about peer mentorship, after participating, mentors believed that they had benefited from doing so. Most respondents perceived that collaborative lesson planning and team teaching was beneficial to both candidates. The majority of novices each year mentioned that working with their mentor partner decreased the stress associated with transitioning to the role of a teacher candidate and/or increased their confidence.

*The idea at first seemed horrible, but things turned out pretty well. I think that more opportunities for team teaching help the mentor and the novice. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

*Knowing another fellow student who was in my position last year was going to be in the classroom with me, made me less stressed and my transition to the class was smoother. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

*It takes some of the pressure off to have someone at almost the same level of experience to discuss and plan with. When the mentorship program is working well lesson plans are easier to come up with, and lessons are less stressful to deliver. Team teaching is really a pleasure and I believe that the students really benefit from the partnership between the two teacher candidates and the associate. (Year 1 Novice, April 2010)*

Working in the same classroom provided shared understandings of students' needs and the particular challenges of that placement setting. Many candidates each year perceived that working together from this common ground and reflecting on how to overcome their teaching challenges enabled them to develop strategies for classroom management and provide personal and professional support for one another.

*It was great working with someone else to discuss ideas, strategies and lessons. I loved having someone else to reflect with at the end of lessons because sometimes she noticed things I didn't. Also on days that were frustrating it was nice to have someone to support and understand the problems and challenges in the classroom. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

*The strength is all in the team teaching in my opinion. The team teaching helps you effectively assess and evaluate students while making more elaborate lesson plans and focusing on classroom management and student behavior. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

In a few instances each year, candidates perceived their mentor or novice partner as providing greater support than their hosting associate teacher.

*I felt like discussing and reflecting with her [peer mentor] was valuable. I didn't have the best experience with my associate as she was very passive and lacked motivation, organization and basically just handed out worksheets/textbook work, so having my mentor there ensured I actually was learning tips and tricks and aspects of effective lessons. Also it provided an outlet to discuss ideas and frustrations since it wasn't always the easiest to approach the associate. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

*As a mentor I thought it was great to have someone there for support especially when the associate teacher does not provide the appropriate support. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

### ***Inquiry Stance***

Some participants each year reported that they felt more comfortable adopting an inquiry stance and asking their peer mentorship partner questions about their practicum than they did exposing their vulnerability by asking their associate teacher questions. In some instances, their questions appeared to be those that required in-depth understandings of the classroom context (e.g., how to deal with specific students). Therefore, without being placed in the same classroom, these questions may have been difficult for a peer to answer.

*The mentorship program allows for first year students to interact with another student teacher about the classroom they are in. It isn't always easy to talk about everything regarding the class with your associate teacher. I was less stressed out going into an unfamiliar environment when there was another student there with me. She gave me a lot of guidance as to how to deal with certain students. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

*This program allows incoming students the opportunity to feel open to discussing any concerns or to have questions answered about their placement. Sometimes it is not as easy to talk to the [associate] teacher about students. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

Each year some novices attributed their professional growth to the willingness of their peer mentor to answer practicum-related questions and the non-threatening guidance provided.

*This year I have grown so much because of my mentor! She was always there for me when I had questions that needed to be answer[ed], and supported me 110% every day. (Year 1 Novice, April 2010)*

*It gives you someone who is [a] constant support, someone who is willing to answer all of your questions but also someone to grow with as a teacher. Both mentor and novice grow from this experience and this is what I feel is most beneficial. They both have something to teach and something to learn. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

Peer mentorship appeared to create a risk-free environment within which to pose questions and seek clarification. While this was perceived to be of greatest benefit to novices, a few mentor candidates each year shared perceptions that it was beneficial to both candidates.

*Enables both students to ask questions without feeling silly or stupid. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

*Both students have someone to go to besides the associate teacher when they have comments/questions/concerns. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

*It is helpful being able to discuss things with someone who is going through the same thing you are and being able to learn from each other. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

### ***Mentors: Consolidation of Learning***

While many mentors in all three years of this study perceived that they benefited from collaborative practice, a few mentors each year also shared perceptions that participating in the peer mentorship model enabled them to consolidate their learning and develop their emerging professional identity as teachers. Explaining their teaching beliefs and teaching activities to a novice first-year candidate fostered critical thinking and enabled mentor candidates to exercise leadership in their practicum setting.



*The biggest strength of the program was that I learned about who I was as a teacher. Sharing my different beliefs on classroom management and what it means to be a teacher really helped me grow. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

*As a mentor it got me to think more about what I was doing because I had to explain some of the strategies I used. Commenting on my novice's strategies also got me to think critically. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

*It gives mentors the chance to engage in teaching leadership roles and explain things to assist someone younger [less experienced] than them in teaching... Mentors also learn new things from their novices, and the partnerships encourage cooperation and teamwork. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

Additionally, a few mentor candidates each year perceived that working with their novice partner made them more aware of their own strengths and growth as a teacher candidate.

*From observing my first year novice partner, I was able to see how much I have improved since I was in their position. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2010)*

*Great way to learn and improve on team teaching skills. Also improved the way one looks at their own teaching strengths. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

Each year a few mentors also shared that their mentorship role enhanced their professional commitment. These mentors perceived that they were responsible to set high standards of practice for their novice partner to emulate.

*It kept me on task and working hard because I had to be a role model for someone. It definitely taught me the importance of teamwork. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2009)*

*I think the mentorship program helps hold 2nd and 3rd years student to a higher standard of accountability. They have to be prepared to be able to lesson plan and team teach effectively with their novice. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

Although some mentors were initially skeptical that the peer mentorship practicum model would be beneficial to them, after participating, many perceived that it fostered their professional growth, as well as that of their novice partner.

## Challenges

Consistent across participants' pre- and post-practicum responses each year were perceptions that the roles and responsibilities of mentor and novice candidates required further clarification for candidates and/or their hosting associate teachers. The expectations of co-planning and team teaching required adopting a perception of teaching as a collaborative rather than an independent practice. Adjusting to this paradigm shift appeared to be challenging. Additionally, in some instances, novices and mentors shared perceptions of problems with candidate compatibility. Tensions negotiated by mentors who did not take part in this program as novices were apparent in the first two years of implementation. While these were resolved over time, unresolved were the barriers to collaborative practice created by the need to pair some novice candidates each year with a mentor partner in a different classroom or school.

## Role Clarity

Mentorship between teacher candidates was intended to foster reciprocal learning. That is, mentor and novice candidates were expected to learn from and with one another through collaborative practice. Combining

mentorship between teacher candidates with traditional mentorship between candidates and their hosting associate teachers was perceived by teacher candidates to create confusion. Each year, many respondents shared perceptions that the roles and responsibilities of mentor and novice candidates in the peer mentorship practicum model required further clarification for participating candidates and/or their hosting associate teachers.

During the first year of full implementation, role clarity was particularly challenging. Although school board partners were advised of the implementation of the peer mentorship practicum model, this did not appear to be communicated to all hosting associate teachers. In fact, occasionally candidates shared that their associate teacher did not know that they were scheduled to host a novice who would commence the practicum in January: "My associate teacher was not even aware that she had a second student teacher coming" (Year 1 Novice, April 2009).

In 2009, many respondents shared that they were unclear of their roles and responsibilities as novice and mentor candidates. They also perceived that their associate teachers lacked clarity about their roles in mentoring a dyad and about the roles of novice and mentor candidates.

*I'm not too sure that I was effectively prepared for my role as the mentee. I was confused as to my role in the classroom with my mentor and how exactly we're supposed to co-plan and co-teach.... You need to define exactly what you mean when you want us to co-plan and co-teach, like how you want us to exactly do that. (Year 1 Novice, January 2009)*

*More guidance is needed: I don't think anyone really understood the roles of the two candidates in the same classroom. (Year 2 Mentor, January 2009).*

*I think that the associate teachers are unsure of how to deal with two student teachers in the classroom. So there needs to be education for them in order to allow for both the mentor and mentee to be able to adapt well into the specified roles. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

*Have all the associate teachers understand the meaning of a novice and a mentor and how much each student teacher is supposed to be teaching in a day. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

Each year several approaches were intended to prepare candidates for their roles (e.g., mentorship workshop, curriculum methods courses). Candidates in the same cohort group each year provided both positive and negative comments about the effectiveness of each approach. For instance, inconsistent perceptions about the effectiveness of the mentorship workshops were revealed in 2011 year two mentor candidates' responses.

*I found the workshops and faculty advisor meetings very useful and beneficial to me in preparing to be a mentor. I was better prepared to assist my novice in any problems she encountered and was more confident in my ability to help her. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

*I think that things such as the PowerPoint presentation and the mentorship workshop pointed out the obvious and logical instead of preparing us for the team teaching and the mentor role we had ahead of us. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

Similarly, in 2011, some candidates were positive about the impact of their curriculum methods courses, while others perceived that topics like team teaching were not sufficiently addressed.

*I think since I did a bunch of team teaching this year, I would like to see in Methods classes a lesson on exactly what team teaching is and how to work together with your mentor to prepare a good lesson. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*Methods class was highly effective in preparing me for my placements and the mentorship program. I feel like the material was extremely relevant and helpful to preparing me for everything. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

*I feel as though there were no strategies for us as mentors. We didn't have any Methods class or anything that specifically told us if you do this, this will happen. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

More positively, in 2010 and in 2011, there was an increase in mentors' perceptions of role clarity and preparation. However, this was attributed most commonly to mentors' prior participation as novices or to testimonials from mentors who took part in peer mentorship in prior years. While some candidates acknowledged that the approaches intended to prepare them, such as information in *The Practicum Handbook*, were helpful, prior experience in the model appeared to be of greatest importance in preparing mentors for their roles.

*The written explanations of roles are helpful in preparing me for my role in the mentorship program but I think that the most helpful information so far has been from people who took part in mentorship program before. (Year 3 Mentor, January 2010)*

*I feel that I learned how I wanted to be a mentor from my experience as a novice. I chose to do some of the same things my mentor did and a lot of different things just to help out my novice. So I didn't really use the strategies from the school [university] to prepare myself. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

*I feel that the only effective strategy that worked to prepare me for my role in the mentorship program was to participate in it [as a novice]. It was only through participating that I became prepared. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

While candidates' concerns about their preparation for their own roles decreased, their opinion that roles were not well understood by associate teachers increased between 2009 and 2011. It is difficult to ascertain whether there was an actual increase or, alternatively, whether enhanced understandings of their roles provoked candidates to focus on the needs of associate teachers.

*Associates tend to have more problems having two students rather than just one. Expectations should be more clear and precise. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

*Mentor/novice roles need to be more clearly outlined and both teacher candidates need to be meeting expectations...Associate Teachers need to be made aware that both partners need to plan and implement solo lessons, although team teaching should be encouraged. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

While the challenge of clarifying the roles of mentors decreased between 2009 and both 2010 and 2011, role clarity remained a challenge during the first three years of implementation of this practicum model. These results are consistent with the quantitative results that indicated that preparation effectiveness increased over time but remained at or below moderately effective.

### ***Perceptions of Teaching as Independent Practice***

The peer mentorship practicum model was presented to participants each year as an opportunity to engage in reflective collaborative practice with a peer teacher candidate. That is, while it was acknowledged that mentor candidates were slightly more experienced, the expectations for reciprocity and learning from and with one another, through co-planning and co-teaching lessons, were addressed explicitly. However, many candidates in 2009 and 2010 appeared to perceive that they were "teaching" when they were doing so alone, rather than with their mentorship partner. Participants' responses revealed that candidates and/or associate teachers appeared to hold perceptions of "teaching" as an independent rather than a collaborative practice. In some instances, this appeared to provoke associate teachers to discourage candidates from engaging in co-

planning and co-teaching. In other instances, mentors or novices did not support co-teaching.

*Associate teachers need to be more aware of the expectations. My novice and I very rarely got to co-plan or co-teach any lessons. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2009)*

*Mentors should be aware that their novice should be co-teaching with them. I never co-taught with my mentor because she felt it was unnecessary. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

Each year, some novice and mentor respondents expressed concerns that the peer mentorship practicum model reduced their individual “teaching time”: “Neither gets as much experience as if they were on their own in the classroom” (Year 2 Mentor, April 2009); “I felt that I was not given enough time for my own lessons” (Year 1 Novice, April 2009).

While there was a decrease in the number of responses indicating this challenge in 2011, some mentors’ perceptions of teaching as individually facilitating student learning seemed to promote continued competition for “teaching time.” In part, this may have been affected by the focus of their practicum evaluations; mentors were evaluated on their ability to teach individually, rather than on their abilities to work collaboratively and co-teach with their novice partner. Additionally, the individual expectations of novices and mentors in *The Practicum Handbook* may have reinforced perceptions of teaching as an independent practice, as the number of lessons to be co-taught was undefined.

*There was not a lot of teaching time allotted to me personally during the semester, due to the fact that my mentor was in third year, and therefore she needed more teaching time than me. Which I understand, but I did not get the amount of teaching done that was specified in the handbook during both regular practicum [Mondays], and the practicum week [at the end of the year]. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*For 2nd and 3rd year students it is often incredibly difficult to get the teaching time we need to be assessed appropriately if [we are] constantly being grouped with a novice...I don't think team teaching should be so required. I think it should be insisted to associate teachers that 2nd and 3rd year students need teaching time away from the novice. I realize the novice needs to practice teach but I think their participation needs to be lessened. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

The practicum evaluation criteria for mentors and the individual expectations of novices and mentors in *The Practicum Handbook* may have created constraints to engaging in co-teaching as recommended.

### **Candidate Compatibility**

The effectiveness of the peer mentorship model was dependent on the willingness and abilities of teacher candidates to work together. Many respondents each year recognized that compatibility was an important variable in the success of their peer mentorship partnership.

*It basically came down to did we get along? Yes. So let's work together and teach each other, and it happened to work out very well for me the mentor. If you get along, it can be very beneficial to have an extra pair of hands and an extra brain when preparing and when teaching. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)*

Unfortunately, a few novice and mentor respondents each year reported that they were incompatible with their peer mentorship partner, which created tension and stress. In some instances, respondents attributed this to diverse perspectives on how best to plan or teach lessons and/or inconsistent teaching styles, which made co-teaching challenging.

*With team teaching I sometimes felt that my ideas were vetoed because my mentor felt her idea was better or maybe it was because she really felt my contribution would just not work the way she saw the lesson. (Year 1 Novice, April 2009)*

*It was difficult to co-teach because my mentor and I did not always want to teach the lesson the same way; we have different teaching styles. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*Personally I do not like the mentorship program. I find it doesn't benefit myself as a mentor having a novice. Team teaching I found to be impractical; we both had different teaching styles. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

In other instances, candidate incompatibility was related to the attitudes, personality characteristics and/or work ethic of participants. When candidates were incompatible, the peer mentorship model was perceived to create increased stress for novices and mentors.

*Unfortunately there were two aspects for me personally that made the mentorship program not as beneficial as it could be. First my mentor and I did not get along on most things. We had completely opposite views on almost everything... I know now how NOT to teach or treat the children. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*I think it can be great if you have a good novice or it can make your placement extremely stressful and unfortunate if you have a novice who is unwilling to cooperate or who has a poor attitude. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

A few respondents each year questioned whether all candidates should take part in peer mentorship. In particular, they recommended that candidates have the opportunity to opt out if they did not want to assume the mentor role. As peer partnerships were established based on the practicum location requested, candidates who wanted to be mentors were occasionally unable to do so, while those who did not want to do so were allocated a novice partner.

*There should be a new rule, a year 2 and 3 can decide whether they want a novice or not. It's not fair when an upper [year student] doesn't want a novice and gets one and another upper year does want a novice and doesn't get one. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2011)*

*I think that people that don't want to be mentors maybe shouldn't be mentors. I loved being a mentor but last year when I was a first year, my mentor had a negative impact on my teaching and I was very unimpressed with her lack of effort and support for me. We didn't team teach at all and she ignored me in the classroom. People that don't like team building activities should not be mentors. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

*Don't give a third year student a mentor if they have already had one and wish to be working by themselves. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

Occasionally, mentors perceived that competition for future teaching positions promoted resistance to the peer mentorship model: "There are objections to this program because ultimately, we are training and aiding our future competitors" (Year 3 Mentor, January 2009).

A few respondents each year shared that pairing candidates on the basis of common interests would enhance compatibility.

*I know some people didn't see eye to eye with their mentor or novice partner, although I did not have this problem, but possibly a matching process more like roommate pairings would be appropriate where applicable (due to location restrictions of course), to create a better sense of chemistry and a closer relationship between mentor and novice. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2010)*

*I think that if mentors and novices were matched up based on their interests and teachable subjects*

*things would go a lot smoother. Team teaching was a lot easier for me this year because my novice and I both are interested in the Arts and English. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

Arguably, teacher candidates could be paired on the basis of common interests. However, since this program places candidates first based on the geographic location they self-select for their practicum placement, maintaining this practice while simultaneously pairing novices and mentors on the basis of other factors such as common interests may be difficult to coordinate.

### ***Tensions Negotiated by the First Cohort of Mentors***

Implementing peer mentorship between candidates at different stages of program completion necessitated a first cohort of mentors who had not participated as first-year novices. In 2009, all mentors, and in 2010, year three mentors, had not had the novice experience. Perhaps not surprisingly, some mentors from this first cohort suggested that the status quo should have been maintained and that it was unfair to ask them to devote time to supporting a first-year novice when they had been required to complete individual placements as first-year candidates.

*I feel first year would benefit a lot more from the old style of the program, where they have their own class and set expectations. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2009)*

*I do not agree with this program. I think so many people including myself had to do it ourselves during our first year and we made out okay. It is all part of the learning experience within this program and the fact that as BEd students we get all these placements. I think it puts too much responsibility on the mentor... life is busy enough without now having to be the primary contact in helping this first year. (Year 3 Mentor, January 2010)*

In particular, the first cohort of mentors perceived that eliminating the evaluation of first-year candidates by faculty advisors decreased accountability and preparation for later formal evaluations. While this change was unrelated to peer mentorship, it occurred at the same time and therefore was perceived to be associated with implementing the peer mentorship model.

*I feel the first years need to be evaluated by their faculty advisor by the end of year 1. Having the first years not being evaluated just makes them not be prepared for their evaluation in second year. (Year 2 Mentor, January 2009)*

*I think the year ones should have to be evaluated so that they understand what it feels like and are more prepared to deal with it later. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2009)*

*I think the first-year novices should be evaluated by faculty advisors... If first years were evaluated by faculty advisors, even if it's not in-depth, it would lead them up to an in-depth evaluation in second year. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2010)*

However, these concerns were eliminated in the open-ended response data in 2011, by which time all mentors had been novice candidates in this practicum model. The tensions negotiated by the first cohort of mentors decreased between 2009 and 2010 and were resolved by 2011. The open-ended response results detailed here give voice to the factors that impacted the quantitative ratings of mentors who lacked the novice experience in this practicum model.



### *Paired Placements in Different Classrooms*

A significant challenge of implementing this model was securing peer mentorship practicum placements while simultaneously maintaining the practice of allowing candidates to self-select the geographic location of their placements. Inconsistent numbers of candidates who requested a location and/or a lack of associate teachers who were willing to host a novice and a mentor in some areas necessitated placing between 16 and 20 novices each year with a mentor in another classroom in the same school, or in another school in close geographic proximity. There were no positive comments from respondents who were allocated this type of placement. Each year, candidates in these pairings expressed disappointment in the pre-practicum surveys. While acknowledging that peer mentorship held the potential to be beneficial, respondents perceived that this was predicated on being in the same classroom as their partner.

*I found that I was well informed about having a mentor and how to benefit from one... but only if they are in the same classroom. I was very surprised, unaware, and unprepared for my situation of not having a mentor (she is in another grade 5 class in the same school) in my class. (Year 1 Novice, January 2009)*

*Make sure every year 1 student has a mentor with them in their classroom. I got my hopes up for one and don't have one in my class. (Year 1 Novice, January 2009)*

*I think having a mentor and novice in the same classroom is important because this allows both to work together with the students and co-plan lessons along with co teaching. Being in two different classrooms makes it a little difficult especially since you don't know the students and atmosphere in the other classroom. (Year 2 Mentor, January 2010)*

Post-practicum, respondents also shared perceptions that being placed in a different classroom setting than their partner reduced or eliminated the benefits of the peer mentorship model.

*They should never pair a novice and mentor who are in different classes let alone different divisions. It was a waste of effort and time... and it was not even effective or beneficial in my opinion. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2010)*

*It's great if you have a mentor in the same school/classroom as you are, otherwise it is virtually useless. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*My mentor was at a different school... so it was of no benefit to me whatsoever. Mentors and novices need to at least be in the same school so they can meet during breaks. The mentorship program was a big let down for me this year. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

In 2010 and 2011, it was recommended during the pre-practicum mentorship workshop and in *The Practicum Handbook* that novice and mentor candidates placed in different classrooms visit each other's placement settings to provide opportunities to collaborate. Respondents perceived this as an impractical, unrealistic and/or onerous expectation.

*I've been told by my faculty advisor that it is my responsibility in order to receive a great grade on my evaluation, to leave my own placement where I know the students and the teacher has agreed to help, to [go to] my mentee's class to possibly co-teach with him. I know nothing of that class environment, students, and am not even in the same grade as my mentee. I find that me arranging to sit in on my mentee's class and arrange to miss aspects of my own associate teacher's class is impractical and unfair. (Year 2 Mentor, January 2010)*

*I felt I had almost no part in it [peer mentorship] since my mentor was at a different school in a different city than me. Yet, we were expected to have the same relationship as those in the same classroom but that was unrealistic. (Year 1 Novice, April 2011)*

*Another difficulty is the co-teach... since there are two associate teachers involved, the mentor has to understand the other associate teacher's class in order to co-teach in the class. I think if pairings were limited to being in the same room, it would make the mentorship program run more smoothly. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)*

In sum, the open-ended response data indicated that respondents perceived that the peer mentorship practicum model was not beneficial when candidates were placed in a different classroom than their mentorship partner. These results are consistent with the quantitative results that revealed being in a different classroom than their partner had a significant negative impact on the ratings of mentor and novice candidates.

## Responses to Research Questions

Below we provide detailed responses to each research question, drawing on our quantitative and open-ended response results as relevant.

### **1. What were the benefits of combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these teacher candidates and their hosting associate teachers?**

Our open-ended response and quantitative data support the conclusion that the benefits of the peer mentorship practicum model included additional personal and professional support for novice and mentor teacher candidates. This practicum model fostered candidates' engagement in collaborative practice, which was perceived to be very beneficial to novice candidates and moderately beneficial to mentor candidates. Importantly, the perceptions of novice candidates and the perceptions of mentor candidates were not impacted by whether the peer mentor role was assumed by a year two or year three teacher candidate.

Additionally, our quantitative data revealed that candidates placed in the same classroom as their mentorship partner engaged frequently in the intended collaborative teaching activities, and there was a strong positive relation between engaging in these activities and perceiving that doing so was beneficial to both candidates. Our quantitative data also revealed that there were significant benefits of cumulative participation in this model over more than one year.

The open-ended response data also revealed that this practicum model provided support for both candidates, promoted the adoption of an inquiry stance and fostered mentors' abilities to consolidate their learning. When candidates were placed in the same classroom, the non-threatening relationship fostered through peer mentorship enhanced teacher candidates' willingness to expose their vulnerability and seek answers from one another to questions about how to meet the needs of students in their practicum setting. Mentors also benefitted from explaining teaching activities to their novice partner, which was perceived to foster mentors' abilities to consolidate their learning and further develop their emerging identity as a teacher.

### **2. What were the challenges of combining practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates at different stages of program completion, with traditional mentorship between these teacher candidates and their hosting associate teachers?**

A significant challenge identified in the quantitative data was preparing candidates for their roles in this practicum model. Preparation effectiveness was rated as at or below moderately effective each year by both novices and mentors. This suggests the need to enhance the methods implemented to prepare candidates for their roles in this practicum model.

Challenges identified in the open-ended response data included managing candidate compatibility, as well as clarifying the roles of mentor and novice candidates when working as a dyad. Novice and mentor respondents



perceived that the roles of candidates working as a dyad also required clarification for their hosting associate teachers. Additionally, the open-ended response data revealed that it was challenging to promote a perception of teaching as a collaborative rather than an independent practice. Altering these understandings and adopting perceptions of teaching as collaboratively facilitating students' learning may require clearly defining the expectations for collaborative teaching and reflecting these goals in the practicum evaluation criteria of teacher candidates. During the initial two years of this study, the open-ended response data also highlighted the challenge of engendering the support of a first cohort of mentors who had not benefitted from this practicum model as novice candidates. This challenge was resolved in the third year of this study, at which time all mentor candidates had participated in this practicum model as novices.

### **3. Were there any changes in cohorts of novice participants' perceptions of the peer mentorship practicum model between years of implementation?**

The quantitative and open-ended response data revealed that the majority of novice participants' perceptions of the peer mentorship practicum model were positive over all three years of this study. There was minimal change in novices' Likert-type ratings and/or open-ended responses to the pre- and post-practicum surveys within or between each of the three years of this study.

### **4. Were there any changes in cohorts of mentor participants' perceptions of the peer mentorship practicum model between years of implementation?**

Both the quantitative and open-ended response data revealed an increase over the three years of this study in mentor participants' perceptions of their preparation for peer mentorship and in their perceptions of the benefits for mentor candidates of participating in the peer mentorship model. Over time, mentors developed more positive perceptions of the benefits they derived from engaging in collaboration with their novice partner during teaching and after teaching. Mentor candidates' perceptions of teaching as an activity that individually, rather than collaboratively, supports student learning also decreased between 2009 and 2011.

The open-ended response data supported that the tensions negotiated by the first cohort of mentors who did not have the novice experience in this model decreased between 2009 and 2010, and were resolved by 2011. Over time, the peer mentorship model gained acceptance with mentor participants and was perceived to foster their professional growth as well as that of their novice partners. Similarly, the quantitative data revealed that having the novice experience in this model positively impacted the responses of mentors between 2009 and both 2010 and 2011.

### **5. Were there any significant variances in the perceptions of novice candidates and in the perceptions of mentor candidates that were attributable to their type of placement (i.e., same versus different classroom) or to their program of study?**

Although the comparison of participants placed in the same classroom and in a different classroom than their mentorship partner yielded results that may not be reliable because of the sample size, during the quantitative analyses, all items compared revealed significant differences for both novice and mentor candidates, with participants placed in the same class reporting vastly higher mean scores for preparation effectiveness, frequency of collaboration and benefits of this collaboration for both novices and mentors. Similarly, the open-ended response data revealed that participants placed in a different classroom than their novice/mentor partner did not perceive this type of placement as an effective peer mentorship model. This indicates that it may be preferable to avoid placing peer mentorship partners in different classrooms, as this type of placement reduces teacher candidates' abilities to engage in and derive benefits from the recommended collaborative teaching activities.

Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that there appeared to be minimal impact on the responses of novice and mentor candidates that could be attributable to their programs of study. The one exception was a difference between novice primary/junior and junior/intermediate program respondents' perceptions of

preparation effectiveness, with primary/junior candidates' perceptions higher than those of junior/intermediate candidates. This may be attributable to the exploration of strategies for collaborative practice in their curriculum methods courses. Alternatively, it may be attributable to factors unrelated to peer mentorship, such as the characteristics of candidates who select each program option.

**6. Were there any variations in the perceptions of mentor candidates who participated in peer mentorship practicum model for one year and the perceptions of mentor candidates who took part in the model for multiple years?**

Our quantitative and open-ended response data support that the increases in mentors' perceptions of their preparation for peer mentorship between 2009 and both 2010 and 2011 were attributable to the cumulative effect of participating in the peer mentorship model for more than one year. Additionally, our quantitative data support that the significant increases between 2009 and both 2010 and 2011 in mentors' perceptions of the benefits of engaging in collaboration during teaching and after teaching were attributable to having the novice experience in this model, prior to assuming the role of a peer mentor. Interestingly, mentors' perceptions of the benefits for novices of the collaboration fostered through this model were not impacted by cumulative participation. Furthermore, there was a significant increase in the frequency of engagement in the collaborative activities that was attributable to repeating the mentor experience rather than to mentors' prior participation in the model as novices. Collectively, our quantitative data support that there are benefits to cumulative participation in peer mentorship, as candidates assume the mentor role after participating as novices and/or repeat the mentor experience.

**7. What was the relation between novice and mentor participants' perceptions of how beneficial the peer mentorship practicum model was and the frequency with which they reported engaging in the intended mentoring activities?**

Importantly, our quantitative data revealed that there was a significant strong positive relationship between the frequency with which novice and mentor candidates reported engaging in the recommended collaborative peer mentorship activities and their perceptions that doing so was beneficial for both candidates in the mentorship dyad. Additionally, these results were supported by the open-ended response data over each of the three years of this study.

## Discussion

Collectively, the findings of this study provide considerable evidence that teacher candidates perceived practicum peer mentorship to be beneficial for both novice and mentor candidates. The insights about the benefits and complexities of implementing this innovative practicum model, which combined mentorship between two teacher candidates with traditional mentorship between these candidates and their hosting associate teacher, extend the limited literature that has explored alternatives to traditional practicum models in BEd programs (Foster et al., 2010).

Importantly, teacher candidates perceived that observing one another teach and engaging in collaborative teaching activities with a peer enhanced their teaching confidence and was beneficial to both partners in the peer mentorship dyad. This may be attributable to candidates working within rather than beyond their zone of proximal development, when they were engaged in teaching activities with their peer mentorship partner (Vygotsky, 1986). Moreover, candidates' vicarious experiences observing teaching activities, modeled by a peer in the same classroom with the same students, may have been particularly salient in enhancing their self-perceptions of teaching competence (Bandura, 1986).

Analogous to the benefits of other mentorship programs (Hoban et al., 2009), this study illustrated that practicum peer mentorship between teacher candidates can foster self-confidence and professional growth. Consistent with the experiences of mentors in traditional mentorship programs, mentor candidates in this

practicum model benefited from the opportunity to consolidate their learning and develop their professional identity as a teacher (Hoban et al., 2009). Additionally, similar to other mentorship models in education, this model fostered collegial problem solving and reflection between teacher candidates (Hoban et al., 2009). Significantly, this practicum model also promoted field-based collaborative learning between teacher candidates, which has been identified as important in preparing them for ongoing commitment to collegial collaboration (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

Participants' experiences documented how this model can promote field-based reciprocity between teacher candidates. Time and ongoing attention to promoting reciprocity is required to develop productive educational learning communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Time was especially important to promoting reciprocity in this model, as it provided the opportunity for more candidates to have the experience of being a novice participant in the peer mentorship model.

However, implementing mentorship between candidates at different stages of BEd program completion required a first cohort of mentors who had not benefitted from the program as novices. Although this created perceptions of inequity, it is impossible to begin this model without a first cohort of mentors who lack the novice experience. An implementation dip with this type of model should be expected, which should be resolved over time. Indeed, the increase in mentor candidates' positive perceptions over the first three years of implementation of this practicum model supports the benefits of devoting time and attention to developing a productive learning community within a BEd program (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Teacher candidates' perceptions of the reciprocal benefits of engaging in this peer mentorship model for themselves and their partners may help build a foundation for their commitment to reciprocity as professionals within and beyond this BEd program (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

To promote their professional growth, it is critically important for teacher candidates to ask questions and adopt an inquiry stance about teaching (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 2009). While the importance of associate teachers mentoring teacher candidates is acknowledged widely (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006), this relationship is complex for BEd candidates because the associate teacher is also responsible for evaluating teaching competence. This evaluative relationship has the potential to leave teacher candidates wondering whether exposing their vulnerability or admitting uncertainty will make them appear less knowledgeable, and therefore negatively affect their evaluation. Importantly, consistent with Hoban and colleagues' (2009) assertion, engaging in mentorship activities with a partner who was not responsible for evaluating their teaching competence appeared to increase candidates' willingness to adopt the inquiry stance that is requisite to collaborative professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

Consistent with previous research that investigated shared BEd practicum experiences (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005), the experiences of participants in this model support that there are significant benefits to shared practicum teaching, despite the potential challenges of adjusting to this paradigm shift. Nonetheless, this study demonstrated that implementing this form of practicum model with 13 partner school boards was considerably more complex than implementing a small pilot program.

Researchers have acknowledged the importance of engendering support for innovative practicum models by developing them collaboratively with participating school board partners (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010). On the basis of the effectiveness of a small pilot initiative developed in close collaboration with the pilot site administrator, this peer mentorship practicum model was implemented with all school board partners. The willingness of associate teachers to host dyads of candidates, as well as their understandings of the roles of novice candidates, mentor candidates and associate teachers in this practicum model may have been enhanced if more school boards had been actively involved in developing this innovative practicum model.

Program changes that involve paradigm shifts in the expectations of teacher candidates require close communication with hosting associate teachers (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Indeed, lack of communication between universities and their school-based partners may create situations

where there is a lack of understanding of the practices advocated and implemented in one setting and the other (Foster et al., 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Lack of face-to-face communication with associate teachers about the implementation of the peer mentorship practicum model may have affected their understandings of this model.

Although there was considerable face-to-face communication with field-based partners about this practicum model, this occurred with administrators and central school board office personnel. Direct communication between the university and associate teachers about the peer mentorship model through the provision of written material appeared to be insufficient. As the ongoing effectiveness of practicum experiences is contingent upon the support of field-based partners in general and associate teachers in particular (Foster et al., 2010; Loughran, 2006), alternate forms of communication with associate teachers may be required.

Effective mentorship programs require contextual supports and careful attention to the selection and preparation of mentors (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Hoban et al., 2009). Teacher candidates' perceptions of their associate teachers' lack of clarity about their roles in this practicum model indicate that not all associate teachers were prepared for their roles in mentoring a dyad. Moreover, as some teachers are resistant to collaborative teaching (Knight, 2009), ensuring support for these methods should ideally be considered in selecting associate teachers who are responsible for mentoring and supporting a dyad of teacher candidates in their efforts to co-plan and co-teach.

Additionally, consistent with Hoban and colleagues' (2009) assertion, candidate compatibility was affected by limiting the selection criteria for mentor teacher candidates to requests for placements in the same geographic area as a novice. Compatibility in a peer mentorship model may be enhanced by ensuring that second- or third-year candidates are willing to engage in a peer mentorship relationship with a novice, and by considering factors such as the interests of candidates when establishing mentorship partnerships (Hoban et al., 2009). However, if all BEd candidates are required to participate in a peer mentorship practicum model and engage in collaborative practice, candidate compatibility may be expected to affect some pairings.

Furthermore, limiting the criteria for the selection and pairing of mentorship partners to their requests for practicum placements in the same geographic area reduced the potential for all candidates to be placed in the same classroom as their mentorship partner. Peer mentorship between candidates in different classrooms may provide greater support than not being allocated a peer mentor. However, when the vast majority of candidates are placed in the same classroom as their peer partner and the expectations outlined (e.g., co-teaching) require being in the same classroom, those who do not have this experience may justifiably feel that they have been allocated an inferior placement.

The findings of the first year of this study revealed the need to create support structures for teacher candidates not placed in the same classroom as their mentorship partner and it was recommended that they be provided with opportunities to spend time in one another's placement settings (Grierson et al., 2011). However, continued investigation of this practicum model revealed that these recommendations were not well received by participants. In order to overcome demographic constraints and maximize the potential for all candidates to have the opportunity to derive benefit from this peer mentorship practicum model, it may be necessary to discontinue the practice of candidates self-selecting their practicum location and instead focus on the priority of placing mentor and novice in a practicum setting willing to host a dyad.

More positively, as anticipated, the perceptions of inequity negotiated by the cohort of mentor candidates who lacked the novice experience in this model were resolved by the third year of this study, by which time all mentor candidates had been novice participants in this practicum model (Grierson et al., 2011). As eliminating the evaluation of first-year candidates by faculty advisors increased these initial tensions and was unrelated to this practicum model, it may have been prudent to postpone this change until after the implementation of the peer mentorship model. Making changes that are unrelated at the same time that a new practicum model is implemented may promote perceptions that the changes are conjoined and directly related. As it is important to connect teacher candidates' field experiences with their university BEd program

coursework (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006), it was recommended that the program's curriculum methods courses focus on mentorship, with particular attention paid to strategies for co-planning and co-teaching. However, not all respondents in this study perceived their course experiences to have provided this support. As such, additional supports for mentorship participants focused on strategies for co-planning and co-teaching may be warranted. A university seminar or cohort group that is aligned with and provided throughout the duration of the peer mentorship practicum placement may provide the support required to clarify candidates' roles and prepare them to implement the strategies that are recommended.

Furthermore, examining participants' open-ended responses revealed that the university might have unintentionally provided teacher candidates with "mixed messages" about their roles and responsibilities. Specifically, while the number of lessons that each individual teacher candidate was expected to teach each day was defined, the number to be collaboratively planned and taught was not. This may have fostered perceptions of teaching as an independent rather than a collaborative practice and may have been counterproductive to the intent of this practicum model. This highlights the importance of clearly defining the roles of teacher candidates in this type of practicum model and ensuring that consistent cohesive messages are provided.

Importantly, this study revealed that most teacher candidates adopted positive perceptions of practicum peer mentorship over time. Although it is challenging to adjust to the shift to practicum peer mentorship, the results of this study revealed that there are significant benefits for teacher candidates of a peer mentorship practicum model. This is consistent with the assertions of others who have investigated teacher candidates' experiences in shared practicum placements (Bullough et al., 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005). While there were challenges in implementing this innovative practicum model, many identified here might be reduced through increased collaboration with school board partners (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010), as well as careful attention to the selection and preparation of associate teachers as mentors (Hoban et al., 2009). This may enhance field-based support for the model and promote associate teachers' willingness to host two candidates (i.e., a novice and a mentor), which will reduce the number of candidates who are unable to be placed in the same classroom as their peer mentorship partner. Additionally, enhanced university-based support and preparation of novice and mentor teacher candidates for their roles in this innovative practicum model appears to be warranted.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Teacher education practicum placements are important, yet their complexities make them imperfect (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Loughran, 2006). While this innovative practicum model was no exception, this study provides considerable evidence that, despite the implementation challenges of adopting this practicum model, peer mentorship holds the potential to foster field-based collaboration between candidates and provide additional personal and professional support to novice and mentor teacher candidates. Collectively, the findings of this study provide teacher educators with reason for optimism about the potential benefits of innovative practicum models. They also caution that the implementation of new practicum models requires careful attention to clarifying the redefined roles of teacher candidates and associate teachers. Furthermore, this study affirms the importance of close collaboration with school-based partners in the development and implementation of new practicum models (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Hoban et al., 2009). The following recommendations may provide guidance for others seeking to implement and explore peer mentorship practicum models in multi-year BEd programs.



## Recommendations for Practice

### **1. Practicum models that involve changes in the expectations of teacher candidates and associate teachers should be developed in close collaboration with field-based partners.**

Engaging a broad cross-section of school-based partners in developing or refining an innovative practicum model may enhance field-based understanding and support for the model. Additionally, it may provide increased opportunities to prepare associate teachers for their role in the model.

### **2. The criteria for allocating practicum placements should reflect the relative importance of program goals.**

In placing candidates first by the geographic location they requested and then attempting to find a mentorship partner in the same location, peer mentorship was allocated a position of secondary importance. If practicum peer mentorship is of primary importance, securing a placement where candidates can be in the same classroom as their partner may need to be prioritized first, and other factors such as the location candidates request prioritized second.

### **3. There may be an implementation dip when candidates who have not been novices in a peer mentorship practicum model are required to take part as mentors.**

Implementing a peer mentorship model between novice and more experienced candidates requires a first cohort of mentors who lack the novice experience. An implementation dip and the potential for the first cohort of mentors to perceive this as inequitable should be anticipated.

### **4. Multimodal communication with hosting associate teachers may enhance effective implementation of field-based program changes like practicum peer mentorship.**

Direct communication with associate teachers about the changes to field-based expectations of teacher candidates in this study was predominantly through written materials that may not have been read and/or understood. Communication with hosting associate teachers is important and may be enhanced through using multimodal methods, such as short video presentations about the practicum model, posted on the university website, together with web-based discussion forms to provide a vehicle for ongoing direct communication with associate teachers.

### **5. The program should strive for consistency in the field-based teaching practices that are advocated by the Faculty of Education and those that are introduced, modeled and supported in the BEd program.**

Teacher candidates need to be prepared to enact the field-based teaching practices that are advocated by their faculty. Introducing and modeling recommended practices (e.g., co-teaching) in BEd coursework might enhance candidates' confidence and competence engaging in these practices during their practicum placements. A professional seminar or course that is aligned directly and provided during candidates' practicum experiences may provide a forum to ensure the field-based teaching practices that are advocated by the Faculty of Education are consistently modeled and supported during the BEd program.

## Recommendations for Research

The findings of this study demonstrate that further research investigating a peer mentorship practicum model in teacher education is warranted. The recommendations below may assist those embarking on researching this type of practicum model.

### **1. Associate teachers' and/or university faculty advisors' perceptions of practicum peer mentorship should be investigated.**

This study was limited to the perceptions of teacher candidates. As associate teachers are important partners in classroom-based practicum placements (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010), further research should explore their perceptions of practicum peer mentorship models. Additionally, research should explore the perceptions of

university faculty advisors who provide field-based practicum support for teacher candidates and/or evaluate their teaching.

**2. Research should explore alternative methods of pairing candidates in a peer mentorship practicum model.**

The selection and pairing of novice and mentor candidates in this model was limited to requests for placements in the same geographic area. The impact of alternative methods such as pairing peer mentorship candidates on the basis of common interests should be explored.

**3. Qualitative and quantitative data should be collected and analyzed if a study is intended to inform future development of an innovative practicum model.**

In this study the quantitative data provided evidence of the variance in respondents' mean perceptions of their experiences, while the open-ended response data gave voice to the factors that affected participants' Likert-type responses. Collectively these data provided direction for future refinement of this practicum model. If a study is intended to inform implementation of a practicum model, collection of both qualitative and quantitative data may be important.

**4. Participant demographic information should be collected and analyzed.**

The characteristics of teacher candidates (e.g., age, gender) may have affected the results of this study. Research should explore whether demographic characteristics of participants (e.g., past experiences, gender) are related to the outcomes of a peer mentorship practicum model.

**5. The perceptions that novices and mentors hold of the same dyad should be explored.**

The consistency or lack thereof in perceptions that novices and mentors held of working in the same dyad were unexplored in this study because partnerships were not coded. Future research should explore the perceptions each partner holds of their mentorship dyad.



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