

Alternative Education K-5: Mentoring Students is Better than Teaching

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EDU 667: Capstone

July 7, 2021

Research Question

Alternative Education K-5: Are Mentor Educators Better at Engaging Students in Learning than Teachers? Are educators who mentor students better at creating high-quality, student-centered learning environments and meeting students' academic and social-emotional learning needs?

Introduction

The Alternative Education educator and researcher have purposefully chosen to seek more credibility and validity for the role of the educator and Alternative Education programming offered at the elementary school level. Trying to narrow down the BIG question to conduct action research has been challenging. The focus of alternative education programming at the elementary school level is to effectively ignite the reengagement of learning for disengaged students. It was essential to gain more information by interviewing educators and students whose responses would provide more insight into how a mentor assists students differently from a teacher within a school environment.

Researcher's Stance

When the researcher and educator took on the role of the Alternative Education educator four years ago, there were zero expectations. The researcher's educational and professional background was fine arts, corporate marketing, self-employment, and working as an Educational

Technician with the Gifted and Talented students within the school district. The researcher quickly found that mentoring students to find and utilize their strengths within their academics was rewarding for all participants. When approached to work in Alternative Education for one elementary school, the researcher was uncertain what the school was looking for in the programming because the administration offered little to no assistance or direct planning. There was no evidence of a curriculum solely tied to Alternative Education. The first year consisted exclusively of working with students in an undefined behavior program. The only shared direction was to observe a single student who suffered from Oppositional Defiance Disorder in their general education classroom and follow the child around the school building should they leave the room. After several times of observing and performing this task, the researcher quickly learned what needed to happen was a positive learning opportunity to redirect this student's behavior.

The first step was to offer the student an interest survey. The student interest survey assists the educator in learning more about the student, but it also helps the student learn about themselves and what style of learner they may be at the time of taking the survey. Because our interests change, so do our learning styles. Students should be offered an interest survey at the beginning of every school year.

The first lesson in learning alongside or with the student was to find out more about them and possibly enlighten them about their unique learning style. The survey revealed that they were primarily a visual learner and highly talented in visual arts. However, they had been incapable of attaining a grade in art due to their challenging behavior. By collecting this valuable data on the student, it was clear that changing the environment where they conducted their art assignments

would benefit them. Collaboration with the art teacher assisted in the planning to help this student attain their first art grade of the school year.

Through the interest survey, learning the student's love for technology, and the collaboration among educators, the student completed their art assignments and achieved a grade that exceeded those of their peers. Together, our relationship of learning more about the student allowed the student to learn more about themselves, and thus they became successful and felt successful in school.

The Village Elementary School Alternative Education Programming assists approximately twenty students per year with reengagement in learning since its creation in 2017. General education teachers identify the twenty students through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Village's Alternative Education programming has state standards implemented to all eight programming options and explanations of the social-emotional benefits tied to those eight programming options for students.

During its fourth year, the educator and researcher presented a "Preparing for Growth" presentation advocating for leadership revisions and whole school collaboration efforts. The school is one of three elementary schools in the district. Still, it is the only one that successfully designs alternative learning options for students and assists them in meeting or exceeding academic standards and revealing their social and emotional needs. Village Elementary School is nestled in a university town in rural southern Maine with a population of approximately 18,000. Its demographics are middle to upper class and primarily caucasian families.

Review of Literature

Reflecting on past years of practice and the successful outcomes of building positive relationships with students sparked questions of how Alternative Education successfully re-engages students in learning within the public school environment. Is it the programming or the personnel? The research literature for this study is primarily focused on personnel, mentoring. There is a preconceived idea of mentoring in a traditional sense of the word as an educator. In the conventional sense of the word, mentoring can mean an apprenticeship to become certified in skill within a specific profession, but could there be more to it for students and educators? Is mentoring students better than teaching them?

Researching the USM libraries, the literature review search began by using these keywords: mentoring, alternative education, and teaching, all limited to ten years. Five studies were solely on mentoring new teachers and three on mentoring students. The three on mentoring students are literature articles that will assist in understanding that mentoring is more effective than teaching.

The first report chosen by the researcher to include in this study is a report, *Alternative Mentoring Types*, written by Carol A. Mullen in 2016 and it explicitly defines alternative mentoring types. The second research article is *Mentoring to Promote Courage and Confidence Among Elementary School Students With Internalizing Problems: A Single-Case Design Pilot Study* by A.E. Fiat et al.. in 2017. It is an experimental multiple baseline design across participants used to evaluate the efficacy, acceptability, and integrity of a school-based mentoring program. The third study is, *Motivational Interviewing With At-Risk Students (MARS) Mentoring: Addressing the Unique Mental Health Needs of Students in Alternative School*

Placements, conducted by L. Henry et al. in 2021, and is a pilot study assessing the effectiveness of a mentoring program within an alternative behavioral school.

The *Alternative Mentoring Types* by C.A. Mullen (2016) shares the researcher's initial thoughts on traditional mentoring. The goals are to acquire skills, mastery, maturity and develop the organizations' mentality, including schools. Mullen's (2016) report also noted that conventional mentoring fosters only a one-way learning condition, narrowing and limiting the student's potential of mindfulness of reciprocal learning and growth. According to Mullen (2016) students and mentors are learning together:

Alternative Mentoring offers learning partners capable of exploring thinking, equal responsibility for teaching and supporting one another, deepening their thoughtfulness and mindfulness, and possibly extending beyond learning skills and strategies to critical and creative thinking and reflective inquiry. (p. 132)

Alternative mentoring creates learning partnerships. While the mentor is learning more about the student, the student is learning more about themselves and how to become productive members of a community (classroom, school, town, or country). Both the mentor and the student are constantly reflecting on decisions made and instilling the understanding that each individual decision directly impacts our life and the lives of others. (Mullen, 2017 p. 132)

Mullen (2016) classifies eight types of alternative mentoring. These are formal mentoring, informal mentoring, diverse mentoring, electronic mentoring, co-mentoring or collaborative mentoring, group mentoring, multiple-level co-mentoring, and cultural mentoring. This report assisted the researcher's knowledge in their practice, validating and acknowledging the utilization of all eight alternative mentoring types within the Alternative Education

programming. Because students are grouped based on interest, as teams, through technology, this builds positive relationships with the community and each other, and nurtures cross-cultural and collaborative relationships, uniting students to complete a mutual goal. (Mullen, 2016, p. 132-135)

The report also explains, "What makes an effective mentor?" Influential mentors must be highly motivated to mentor others and address and learn more about the students and modify them to address the student's goals and needs. Educational mentors must communicate their efforts to administration within their disciplines to expand mentoring conversations and improve policy and practice. They are reliable, trustworthy, self-directed, receptive, curious, and pull their weight. Educators with these characteristics effectively model and mentor students in becoming self-empowered life-long learners. Mentoring the developing capacity to take responsibility for problem-solving and reflections on decisions made, effectively engage students in thinking critically and creatively about academics and their social and emotional needs (Mullen, 2016, p. 135-136)

Mentoring that promotes life-altering outcomes for people strengthens communities....
(Mullen, 2016, p. 136)

Mentoring based on the student's needs teaches them how to advocate for what they need to learn, live and build positive relationships. When these life skills are learned early through the proper modeling the participants can build positive relationships and strengthen communities.

The researcher also has observed within the school environment that students that face internalizing issues may be overlooked possibly due to the classroom teacher perceiving the disengaged student exhibiting good behavior. The second literature review, Mentoring to

Promote Courage and Confidence Among Elementary School Students With Internalizing Problems: A Single-Case Design Pilot Study by A.E. Fiat et al.. (2017) also confirms that students who internalize problems would benefit from small group interventions, fostering their social-emotional and academic resilience.

Therefore school-based mentoring provides students with a unique pathway for security, guidance, support, and attention. Mentors offer adaptive cognitive and behavioral skills through modeling, coaching, and positive relationship reinforcement.

A substantial body of evidence suggests that high-quality mentoring during elementary school can foster a sense of school connectedness, in addition to enhancing students' self-esteem, academic attitudes, and relational skills. (A.E. Fiat et al., 2017, p. 264)

Providing mentors as early as the elementary school may directly impact disengaged students and change their thinking about themselves as a learner in school as well as redirect how to build positive relationships throughout their lives.

Even as a tier 2 intervention, Mentor-based programs offer at-risk students the support, guidance, and attention necessary in creating a positive relationship in a school setting....high-quality mentoring can foster a connection to the school, enhance self-esteem, change attitudes toward academics and social skills

(A.E. Fiat et al., 2017, p. 264).

Furthermore, the A.E. Fiat et. al, (2017) shares the importance of mentoring at the tier two identification for Response to Intervention (RTI) for at-risk students identified for disengagement due to various life-changing events.

In the third article, *Motivational Interviewing With At-Risk Students (MARS) Mentoring: Addressing the Unique Mental Health Needs of Students in Alternative School Placements*, by L. Henry et al. (2021), mentoring proved successful for student engagement. Still, the mentors received extensive training on the program model, the curriculum, and implementation procedures and mentors were matched appropriately to the student that they would work alongside. (L. Henry et al., 2021, p. 66) In this study, the program is split into four core modules:

(a) Getting to Know You, (b) Honest and Positive Reflections, (c) Goal Setting, and (d) Reflection and Goal Reformation (L. Henry et al., 2021, p. 66).

Each module kept the mentors on track with the student's goals, reflecting on the progress and allowing for modifications. These steps offered ongoing motivation for students in the program and increased their learning outcomes in academics and behavior. (L. Henry et al., 2021, p. 66)

The mentors worked with students for 30 minutes once a week for approximately 12 weeks, completed a checklist and reflections on relationships, and made modifications based on student motivation. The overall outcome was that the teachers, students, and mentors found the experience positive and the students' academic scores increased, and problematic behavior decreased. Overall the mentoring program assisted students in becoming successful learners academically and socially-emotionally. (L. Henry et al., 2021, p. 66)

If alternative schools can successfully foster an environment that enhances motivation and self-efficacy, they possess the potential to become models for effective behavioral interventions (L. Henry et al., 2021, p. 71).

Therefore, alternative mentoring that fosters the whole student has the capability to assist in motivating, encouraging lifelong learning of students within the school environment. Proper trained Mentors may effectively redirect student's behaviors through positive reinforcement changing the student's self esteem and mindset as successful learners.

Methods, Sampling, and Data Collection

The researcher hypothesizes that educators who mentor the whole child also create high-quality, student-centered learning environments and successfully meet students' academic, social and emotional learning needs. Mentoring provides both the Mentor and the student the ability to effectively learn more about reaching the student, the student's learning style, and building positive relationships through guidance and modification based on communication and what the student truly needs to succeed.

This study is a qualitative mixed-method study that used reflections of forty-one K-5th grade students in Alternative Education, interviews of colleagues and researched literature reviews. The action research is a qualitative phenomenological study that consists of interviewing five colleagues within the same school, an educator outside of the school district where the action research took place, but who alternatively educates students at the high school level. And forty-one student reflections videoed by two high school interns, eliminating the researcher's bias.

The high school students spent two weeks working alongside the researcher to know the students within the classroom setting. They interviewed 33 elementary school students about

their experience and how Alternative Education and the researcher assisted them. They worked five days a week for two weeks and conducted student interviews in various areas within the elementary school building. The high school students asked two questions about the alternative education learning opportunity that engaged the K-5 students and assisted them in school. The interviews took approximately 5 minutes to conduct, and the high school students videoed each student's reflections.

The researcher transcribed the student videos and decoded all the information. During the transcription process, the researcher found eight additional students interviewed reflections during week 6 of the action research process and added them to the table, including 41 student reflections for the action research project.

All educators shared fascinating statements regarding their thoughts about traditional classrooms and alternative education classrooms and their effectiveness or not. *"In an ideal teaching and learning environment, yes, I absolutely think prioritizing a mentoring relationship with students would be extremely beneficial for the students. However, with class sizes of up to 24 students, it would be an impossible task for teachers to provide that level of support with each student."* Katherine Bischof, Long-term Substitute

However, the most informative answer was from Janna around this question, "How can alternative educational programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high-quality learning environment?" Janna responded, *"This is a big question. For the first part, flexible and adaptive qualities and characteristics need to be found in the staff upon hiring. Second, the curriculum needs to be student-centered; teachers should adjust as it is implemented - this requires skilled educators. Finally, informal assessments and traditional*

assessments can help determine the quality of the learning—observations and feedback from administration will keep curriculum and delivery in check." Janna Civittolo.

Janna's answer redirected this action research project, and new questions were revealed, how do we ensure hiring appropriate staff for alternative education classrooms? Suppose the primary factor to alternative education is, in fact, the staff. In that case, their flexibility and adaptivity working with students are the driving force in how successful the programming is while offering students an environment that provides academic success. Then what other credentials should be shared during the hiring process to ensure we are hiring the right team to provide a student-centered environment and high-quality education opportunities for students?

To determine if understanding the hiring practices of a school district would benefit this action research project and time limitations, an email of the interview questions was sent to the Assistant Principal, Superintendent of Schools, and an Alternative Education High School Director. At the time of this action research project, their answers did not prove beneficial to this study and are omitted.

What was more intriguing was a new research question that evolved: Are educators who mentor students better at creating high-quality, student-centered learning environments, thus successfully meeting students' academic and social-emotional learning needs in Alternative Elementary Education?

Even at the elementary school level, students need educators who are adaptive, listen, search and create learning opportunities that Mentor and facilitate the whole child's learning. *"I think just the very nature of being in an adaptive program is providing high-quality education*

because when you are looking at that, you are looking for flexible and creative ways to engage the students," Rachel Bell, 4th-grade teacher.

This study will show that building relationships with students through active learning alongside them assists in learning more about them and that modeling appropriate skills does assist them in understanding more about themselves academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, using differentiated learning opportunities based on the student's specific interest engages student academic learning. A supportive mentoring educator who purposefully creates a high-quality, student-centered learning environment successfully reengages students in academics at the elementary school level. *"We could take on a directorial role, which I do not think is always very helpful for students, or we can take on more of a facilitator/mentor role, which I think is what they need. Moreover, they connect better, and they feel like they have autonomy, like they have some control over their learning."* Rachel Bell, 4th-grade teacher

Data Collection

The student stories suddenly became very important in this research study. For this action research project, the 41 students identified as disengaged in the general education classrooms or allied arts either based on behavior or unable to perform appropriately in the traditional classroom setting or simply that students require enrichment opportunities to engage them in attending school. *"The only time I am on time for school is when I know it is Thursday, and I know that I will have Community Art on Thursday."* 4th-grade student.

K-5th students, according to their student interest surveys, engage in eight programming learning opportunities. The researcher transcribed all student interviews and sorted them using

predetermined themes based on the eight programming options. The eight options are Dance, Community Art, Reverse Engineering, Hands-On/Minds On, Student-led Newspaper, Social Skills, Academic Support, and Bucket Drumming. See Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1

Alternative Education Data (41 students K-5th grade interviewed)

Eight Program Options	# of students	Reflections
1. Community Art <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3 5th graders 3 4th graders 4 3rd graders 1 2nd grader 11 students	5th graders (Helps me feel more confident, a good break to do what I love, Working with younger and older kids) 4th graders (I feel free, I found my people, it helps me to come to school on time 3rd graders (I can be creative and I get to know other people not in my class, I can express my feelings, it's relaxing) 2nd grader (I can focus more)
2. Reverse Engineering	2 5th graders 5 3rd graders 1 1st grader 8 students	2 5th graders (helps me learn new things, how things work, how to work with others, teamwork) 5 3rd graders (gives me a restart, likes learning from peers, helps me concentrate and with organization and teamwork) 1 1st grader I think it helps me because when you're in school you like in your chair seat working in here you get to like walking around helping do stuff. I think it helps me because they're older than me, so like they know a little bit more than me, so like it's not Mrs. McColl that is the only person teaching us stuff they're teachers too which is fun."
3. Bucket Drumming	1 4th grader	4th grader "I like that it is comfortable and safe. Like I know that I can rely on her to help me out of bad things. It helps me out if I am stressed. She helps me work it out."
4. Dance	4 3rd graders 1 1st grader 5 students	3rd graders (Helps me get my energy out, helps me listen more, has helped me be in a group with other people, I used to be shy, it's fun)
5. Student-led Newspaper	6 5th graders	All 5th grade students say it helps them improve their writing skills.
6. Academic Support	2 5th graders 2 2nd grader 4 students	5th graders: like coming here because it's a quiet environment and it helps me think and focus more on my work. It gets me into a good mood and it helps me just focus." 2nd grader: I feel like I'm successful."
7. Social Skills/Breakfast group	2 Kindy's 2 1st grader 4 students	K; I have a better day coming here. Cuz it's fun to be nice to other people. K; Listen, safe, hers kind and nice, relaxing 1st grader: I like being here, to be nice, better day coming here first. Makes me calm.
8. Hands On Minds On	1 5th grader 1 K 2 students	5th grader: it makes me think like when I'm having a hard time I think of him doing really good and it helps me to do good K: he's a good friend, I like playing with him

Unpacking and coding the 41 student reflections multiple times and plugging their words into the TAG Crowd resource, the word cloud revealed three emergent themes and categories. Emergent themes were student, helps, and learned. See figure 1.2

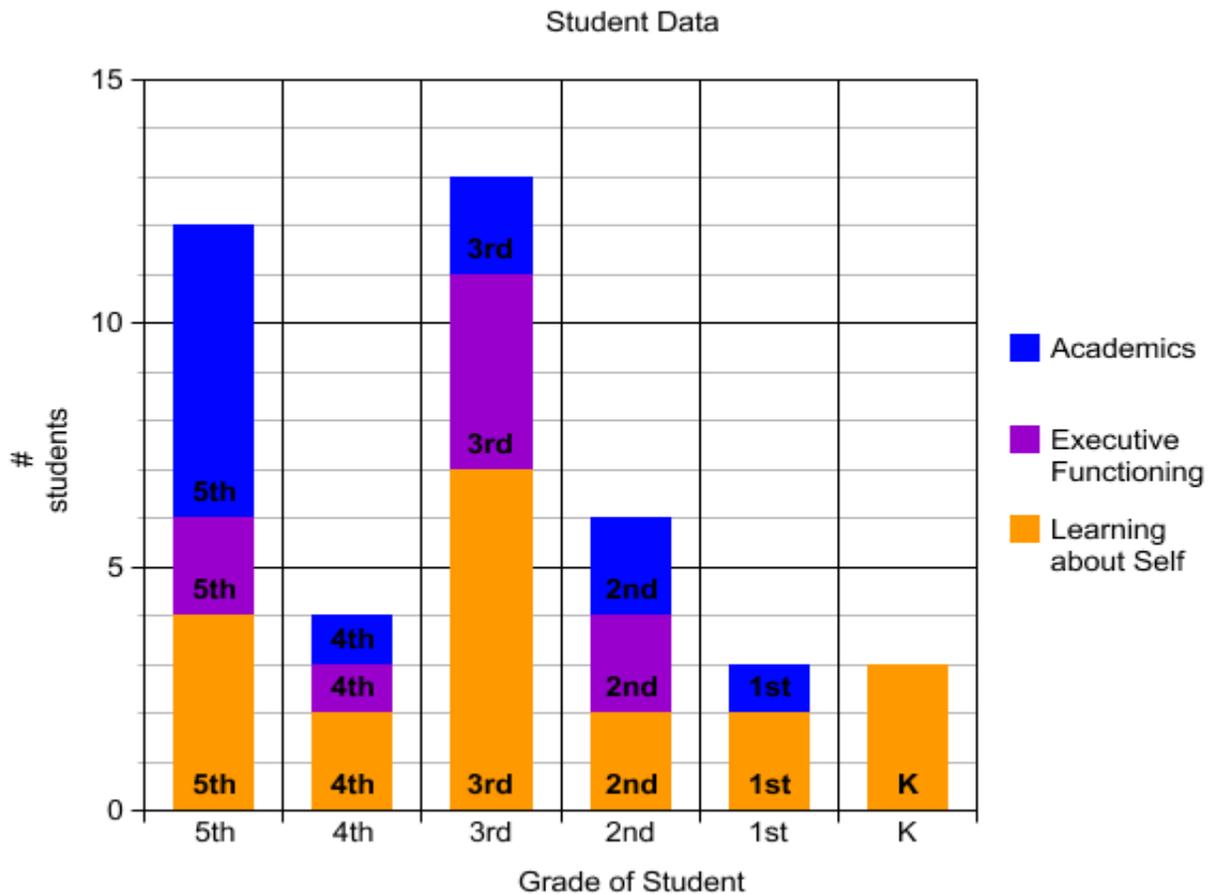
Figure 1.2



It was then that the student’s learning reflections would be graphed and reveal quantitative data on how the programming assisted students' engagement in school. The emergent categories are 1. Academics (Alt Ed program answers why students learn academics), 2. Executive Functioning (focus, time management) and 3. Learning of Self (calm, feelings).

This graph shows that all students engaged in Alternative Education Mentoring Programming help them learn better in academics, increase their executive functioning skills, and learn more about themselves as learners. See figure 1.3

Figure 1.3



Results and Conclusion

According to the researcher of this study the primary focus of alternative education for elementary school students is the reengagement of learning. The researcher also suggests that the role of the Mentor does not necessarily need to be an individual hired into a teaching role. That in fact, the increasing success of student learning may be primarily due to the Mentor-Student relationship that produces a significant difference in a student's willingness to actively enjoy learning. Therefore, the Mentor's sole role is to assist in answering through modeling many positive characteristics the "why" students should engage in life-long learning, revealing its importance at every stage of learning and providing a real-world connection.

This action research study explains the characteristics of the Mentor may be substantially more effective in reengaging learning, redirecting behavior, and making a positive difference in a student's life through modeling, actively listening, modifying environments, and adjusting the curriculum based on the individual student needs.

It also reveals that not every educator may be suitable to mentor students. The study shares that to be an effective mentor, one must instinctively be highly motivated, address and learn more about the student, and adapt in modification to assist the student in reaching their goals, understanding, and meeting their needs.

Mentors must effectively communicate all their efforts to administration, constantly assessing and improving their practice, willing to lead others, productively collaborate with other educators, and strive to improve policy. Additional characteristics beyond best practices are that Mentors should be reliable, trustworthy, self-directed, receptive, curious, driven in advocacy, and an effective model for students to become self-empowered life-long learners. After all, the

Mentor models the ongoing development of taking responsibility for problem-solving through reflecting on decisions made to effectively engage students in thinking critically and creatively about curriculum and what they require socially and emotionally to effectively understand what they are learning.

Through this action research project, we've learned that mentoring programs within a school setting may require specific training, education on program curriculum, and ongoing administrative assessments and observations. Reflections by the Mentor and the students are essential in learning if the programming effectively makes positive academic, behavioral, and social-emotional results among the students in Alternative Education. *"Students learn at different paces and in different ways, which is not accommodational in the traditional classroom setting. With such a high emphasis on test scores and educational levels throughout the grades, teachers do not have the flexibility to adapt students' learning needs."* Katherine Bischof, Long-term Substitute.

Most teachers are unlike mentors in that they often lecture to a large number of students on curriculum, teaching one pathway of learning to all students in a single classroom setting. They do not necessarily need to fully engage students in discussion or critical thinking of the subject matter, often missing students who do not appear to be listening because they are not misbehaving. Therefore, the researcher's action research concludes that the teacher's sole role is to make certain that the students learn and understand the curriculum they are teaching at the time the teaching is taking place.

However, effective mentors learn alongside the student, often in smaller settings, coaching them, and fostering support of the whole child, and offering individual learning plans

based on what the student learning styles may require. The mentoring role requires making personal and environmental modifications based on communication with the student to create a practical learning path, creating a space safe for the students to be able to learn, reducing and possibly removing learning barriers, and reducing internalized behaviors.

This study also reveals the benefits of mentoring diverse groups of students to build stronger communities, offer guidance for peer-to-peer learning of various cultures, and secure positive student-to-student and adult-to-student relationships. *"Now, I think when it comes to engagement, being able to meet the students right where they are in a way that allows them to be exposed to everybody in all different ways does not impact their self-esteem like traditional classrooms,"* Rachel Bell, a 4th-grade teacher.

The limitation of the researcher's action research study is that it does not share the student's voice regarding how they view the role of the teacher and the mentor. We already know that students sometimes need a change in environment to focus on their work, but do they need a different educator? Does the Mentor mean more to the struggling student than that of the teacher? This study does not share the student's views on the Mentor and the teacher at this time. It would be beneficial to learn more about how the Mentor reengages the student in learning and what the Mentoring educator role means to the student and their learning from the student's perspective, as it could add even more educational credibility to the role of the Mentor.

Ethical considerations:

All students have parental permission for videoing reflections and publication. The documentation is on file with the Gorham School Department. For this study, I have chosen not to share their names.

References:

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41 K-5th grade students reflections

Janna Civittolo, Alternative Education High School Special Education Director,

Lincoln Academy

Katherine Bischof, Long Term substitute, Village Elementary School

Jennifer Precopio-Marro, Music teacher, Village Elementary School

Rebecca Thibeault, 3rd-grade teacher, Village Elementary School

Rachel Bell, 4th-grade teacher, Village Elementary School

Jennifer Baker, Social Worker, Village Elementary School

Cheryl Foster, Assistant Principal, Village Elementary School

Heather Perry, Superintendent of Gorham School District

TagCrowd <https://tagcrowd.com/>

IES>NCES Kid Zone <https://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/createAgraph/>

Action Research Timeline, SimpleMind App

Appendix A:

Educator Interview Questions

1. What are some of the barriers for engagement among students within the traditional classroom?
2. How can alternative educational programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high-quality learning environment?
3. Should the benchmarks for the traditional student necessarily be the same for the alternative education students? Why or why not?
4. If students are engaged in learning in the alternative education classroom due to a strong and supportive mentoring relationship, can't all settings prioritize this type of climate to better support all students? If yes, what would you suggest?
5. Is there a way that the needs of "high risk" students can enlighten us in how we address the needs of all students? If yes, what would you suggest?

Appendix B:

Questions for Students

1. How does **(Dance, Community Art, Reverse Engineering, Hands On/Minds On, Academic Support, Social Skills, School Newspaper or Bucket Drumming)** help you in school?
2. How does Mrs. McColl help?

Appendix C:

EDU 643/667/699

Data Transcription and Data Analysis: Direct Quotes, Coding, Categorizing and Construction of Themes

Date and location: May 27, 2021 at Village Elementary School

Name of participant: Jennifer Baker, Clinician/Social Worker

Interviewer: DaraLyn McColl

Transcribed. May 28, 2021

NOTE:

Data Collection and Analysis Organizer

Transcribed interview with Jennifer Baker, LCPC at Village Elementary School, Gorham, ME	Direct Quotes	Predetermined Category / code	Emergent Category / code	Theme across interviews
<p>DaraLyn: [00:00:00] Hey, Jennifer, would you please give your credentials for this interview and it's OK that I'm taping it,</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:00:12] Yes it's OK to tape, OK, I am L.C.P.C,</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:00:13] Which in me means licensed clinical professional counselor and the certificate K-12 school counselor.</p> <p>DaraLyn [00:00:21] It's waiting to see if it's going to work or if you're too far away. Yeah, like it's getting me. All right, so just give us a sense of.</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:00:36] LCPC Licensed Clinical professional counselor and K-12 school counselor and I hold Asst. Principal Leadership endorsement.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:00:45] Ok.</p>	<p>“honestly, our system gets in the way without realizing it, staff and adults realizing it, that what that student is really how they're motivated because we need data so we are constantly looking at how to balance that” - Jen Baker</p> <p>“Teach others, show others, whether it's students and staff”</p> <p>“we noticed smaller classrooms, time with students and engaging and</p>	<p>Set system in place.</p> <p>teaches stuck in their own teaching styles</p> <p>students unsure of their learning styles</p> <p>Examples of alternative educational student outcomes</p> <p>Smaller classes</p> <p>collecting data</p> <p>barriers: set system, old school teachers, students setting events</p> <p>canned curriculum</p>	<p>flipping how students can show their learning</p> <p>examples shared with students and teachers</p> <p>learn from students stories</p> <p>revealing how students learn</p> <p>learning side-by-side with each student</p> <p>teachers and students exploration of alternative learning options</p>	<p>flexible grouping</p> <p>students leading their own learning</p> <p>resources</p> <p>smaller classroom sizes</p> <p>canned curriculum</p> <p>current system gets in the way</p> <p>When students are invested in the process of learning they produce high quality work.</p> <p>benchmark evidence should be individualized and flexible</p>

<p>Thank you. And I'm going to ask five questions to get your insight on the questions. What are some of the barriers to engagement among students within the traditional classroom?</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:01:03] Some of the barriers of engagement. This year during covid, we noticed smaller classrooms, time with students and engaging and learning about them was hugely beneficial. Sometimes, honestly, our system gets in the way without realizing it, staff and adults realizing it, how they're motivated because we need data so we are constantly looking at how to balance that,</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:01:48] That is awesome. OK, number two, how can alternative educational programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high-quality learning environment?</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:02:05] I can't see the words.</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:02:07] What was the question? How can alternative educational programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high-quality learning environment?</p> <p>Jennifer [00:02:19] That's a hard one, again, because it feels like we're competing with an already set system in place. How, how and this is ongoing. We really we have to keep showing</p>	<p>learning about them was hugely beneficial'</p> <p>we're competing with an already set system</p> <p>the more we keep pushing through, showing what can be done, we have had more involvement from staff and really observing what's happening, asking more questions and kind of taking a risk as teachers and staff to have their students explore, explore more in alternative settings</p>	<p>building motivation with students</p> <p>teaching resilience</p> <p>taking risks</p>	<p>working outside-of-the box</p> <p>reinventing learning based on students needs</p> <p>explaining and observing what works</p> <p>autonomy</p>	<p>adaptive and flexible alternative educators and settings are offering high quality education.</p>
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<p>examples of how it works and showing all staff through student examples how they've succeeded with projects with it might be videos of children's work, children explaining it on their own, kind of flipping the learning for students, you know, starting from ground zero and they are creating their lesson and then explaining it just we have to just keep giving examples to our staff so they can see and understand it can be done.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:03:17] Ok, that's great. Thank you so much. If students are engaged in learning in the alternative education classroom due to a strong and supportive mentoring relationship, can't all settings prioritize this type of climate to better support all students?</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:03:35] Of course they can. Yeah, I believe we can. And that's why we have to keep showing examples. And I think we've done that here at Village. Not as fast as we'd like, but the more we keep pushing through, showing what can be done, we have had more involvement from staff and really observing what's happening, asking more questions and kind of taking a risk as teachers and staff to have their students explore, explore more in alternative settings.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:04:15] Great. Thank you. And the last question is, is there a way that the needs of high-risk</p>				
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<p>students can enlighten us and how we can address the needs of all students in the building? And if yes, what would you suggest?</p> <p>Jennifer: [00:04:31] High-risk students, we should slow down and listen to them, whether it's their story outside of school that flows into school, and when you do that, we really figure out how they learn. Sometimes we have to build that motivation with them, are they resilient, and then teach them and show them how they're learning when they might not be able to verbalize it. But that helps them. Teach others, show others, whether it's students and staff, did I answer that question?</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:05:03] Yeah, that was great. Thank you so very much. This will help me with my action research project.</p>				
<p>Memo:</p>				
<p>Jennifer is my supervisor and advocated strongly for Alternative Education Programming within an Elementary School. The programming, data collection, and student grouping has been implemented by DaraLyn McColl.</p>				
<p>Memo:</p>				

EDU 643/667/699 Data Transcription and Data Analysis: Direct Quotes, Coding, Categorizing and Construction of Themes

Date and location: May 27, 2021 at Village Elementary School

Name of participant: Rachel Bell, 4th grade teacher at Village Elementary School, Gorham, ME

Interviewer: DaraLyn McColl

Transcribed. May 28, 2021

NOTE:

Data Collection and Analysis Organizer

Transcribed interview with a 4th grade teacher, Rachel Bell.	Direct Quotes	Predetermined Category / code	Emergent Category / code	Theme across interviews
<p>Rachel: [00:00:00] Hello.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:00:01] Hi, thank you for meeting with me today, Rachel, if you would, just say your name and approve that we're recording this interview. That would be great. And give us your credentials.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:00:12] Yes. My name is Rachel Bell. I am a fourth grade teacher at Village Elementary School.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:00:18] Beautiful. Thank you. I have questions. And the first one is, what are some of the barriers for engagement among students within the traditional classroom?</p> <p>Rachel: [00:00:29] So that's an interesting question, because I know that I was just asking what makes a traditional classroom? Because we're learning my classroom is anything but. Right. So just</p>	<p>Now, I think when it comes to engagement, being able to meet the students right where they are in a way that allows them to be exposed to everybody in all different ways, doesn't impact their self-esteem like traditional classrooms</p> <p>"We could take on a directorial role, which I don't think is always very helpful for students, or we can take on more of a facilitator/mentor role, which I think is what they need. And they connect better and they feel like they have autonomy and they feel like they have some control over their learning."</p> <p>Rachel Bell</p>	<p>negative impact on self esteem</p> <p>set curriculum</p> <p>inequality</p> <p>prejudgement of student learning based on gender or race</p> <p>traditional classroom vs alternative education classroom</p> <p>disengagement</p> <p>inclusion of all students</p> <p>barriers: set curriculum ability grouping low self-esteem teachers preconceived thoughts about students learning</p>	<p>students investing in ownership of their learning</p> <p>authentic learning</p> <p>students progressing on the continuum of growth teaching outside the box.</p> <p>multi-age students in one classroom</p> <p>meeting the students right where they are</p> <p>benchmarks should be flexible based on individual student's learning growth</p>	<p>adaptive and flexible learning environment is offering high quality education</p> <p>student stories</p> <p>flexible grouping</p> <p>students leading their own learning</p> <p>smaller classroom sizes</p> <p>current system is not beneficial for a truly inclusive learning environment for all students</p> <p>When students are invested in the process of</p>

<p>trying to think back to what I envision a traditional classroom as I would go back to my Catholic grammar school days, actually, where in that case, desks were in a row, they were actually bolted to the floor. Wow. Nuns in habits. Um, everybody had a set curriculum. And, you know, if you felt anywhere outside the bell curve, you were either left behind or you were bored. The other thing that was not great was ability grouping as opposed to flexible grouping. And so everybody knew where they stood. So, for instance, with reading, you might have been in the Blue Jays or the Robins or the Cardinals. I forget what they were, but everybody knew that the Cardinals were the low reading group. So if you were placed in the Cardinals, everybody knew. So you had it really impacted your self-esteem. Wow. Now, I think when it comes to engagement, being able to meet the students right where they are in a way that allows them to be exposed to everybody in all different ways, doesn't impact their self-esteem like traditional classrooms did. Um. I also remember being a girl in a traditional classroom, being told girls don't do math.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:02:09] Wow.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:02:10] And why would you want to do</p>	<p>"I think the benchmarks need to be flexible." Rachel Bell</p> <p>"I think just the very nature of being in an adaptive program is providing high quality education, because when you're looking at that, you're looking for flexible and creative ways to engage the students." Rachel Bell</p> <p>I think the benchmarks need to be flexible. I think they need to be movable and as long as each student is progressing upwards, right, kind of blossoming that way, then they're showing goals through it. It's why I have trouble with the standardized testing,</p> <p>They're all just students. But we have the ability, with smaller class sizes and better resources to connect and help each of our students move forward.</p> <p>directed by them</p>	<p>abilities canned curriculum lack of resources ability grouping</p>	<p>adaptive program is offering a high quality education</p> <p>students thrive in an environment when they have some control over their own learning and how they share what they understand</p> <p>teachers are the facilitator of student learning</p>	<p>learning they produce high quality work.</p> <p>benchmark evidence should be individualized and flexible</p>
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<p>that? Because you're never going to have a career in that field. And yes. And so we learned and I can't have the mentality. I can't do math. I went to college saying I can't do math and quickly learned that I'm sorry that wasn't accurate. Once I got out of an environment that allowed me to see that I'm capable of doing that without people kind of pigeonholing you because you were a girl.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:02:44] Wow, that's amazing. I don't think I ever had that encounter in a classroom, but that is mind blowing, actually.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:02:54] We, there was also no inclusion (diversity) in that school. Which I think was just really tragic in a way. I know we had kind of like this dark wing of the school where the kids who had, you know, differences were placed.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:03:11] different from us as well.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:03:13] We would see them on the playground, but they were never in our classes and never exposed (to others). And it was just so sad and isolating for them.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:03:21] Right. I do remember having that in Alabama schools, the children with disabilities were in the basement of our school and they never engaged with us. Agreed? Yes. Yeah. OK, question</p>	<p>so they have ownership over it so they know what they're working towards. I love it, you know, and that makes them proud of their work and want to put out quality work.</p> <p>How much do you want it to be crowd control and how much do you want it to be actual quality education?</p>			
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<p>number two is how can alternative education programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high quality learning environment?</p> <p>Rachel: [00:03:48] I think just the very nature of being in an adaptive program is providing high quality education, because when you're looking at that, you're looking for flexible and creative ways to engage the students. So you're meeting the students right where they are. And when you do that, they get excited. And that's way more than half the battle when they're enjoying what they're doing and they actually don't even realize they're learning because they're enjoying it. (Right.) Right now, you know so once they get into that, I think that they have some control over what you're going to create as a project where you're going to go with this, where you're going to flow with this. And learning is authentic and it's not canned. And, you know, I really just think when you're in an environment like that, they thrive better. Hmm. Than when they're told what to do.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:04:40] When I came into your classroom today, I could see so much engagement just with you. I couldn't find you in the room right when I walked in because you were lower. You were allowing the kids to show their work to you. And they definitely seemed</p>				
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<p>very excited to show what they're working on. So I appreciate that statement.</p> <p>Should the benchmarks for the traditional student necessarily be the same for the alternative education students? Why and why not?</p> <p>Rachel: [00:05:11] Ok, I'm going to be controversial with this. This is a great benchmark to drive me a little crazy and OK just by the very nature of it, because I think if you're truly looking to do flexible education, it's almost to me like you don't even have something like this in your fourth grade class or fifth grade class. You know, in the past I've taught, um, looping classes and I've also taught, you know, multiage classes. (Nice.) And I like those because I think it does away with the benchmark that all fourth graders need to X, Y, Z. Right? And, um, it allows, again, for the students to be progressing on this continuum of growth. And so, you know, I think when you're looking at alternative education, are you looking at a classroom that kind of thinks outside the box like that? I'm just kind of looking to see if I'm going in the right direction here. I think the benchmarks need to be flexible. I think they need to be movable and as long as each student is progressing upwards, right, kind of blossoming that way, then they're showing goals through it. It's why I have trouble</p>				
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<p>with the standardized testing, I'm going to get in trouble.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:06:31] No, you're fine. You're not. You're doing great. I appreciate it. It's really just for me to pull things in and out. So, yeah, you're doing great. If students are engaged in learning in an alternative education classroom due to a strong and supporting mentoring relationship, can't all settings prioritize this type of climate to better support all students? If yes, what would you suggest?</p> <p>Rachel: [00:06:55] All right. So I'm going to read that due to the end of my day's brain.. Mm hmm. Well, you would think so, right? Yes, you would certainly, as I'm looking at the way that that's stated, my mind just says, isn't that what makes a quality educator nice in any setting? That's what we should be doing for our students and they are our priority. And, you know, we could take on a directorial role, which I don't think is always very helpful for students, or we can take on more of a facilitator mentor role, which I think is what they need. And they connect better and they feel like they have autonomy and they feel like they have some control over their learning. They don't feel like they're being told what they must do. It allows for flexibility and creativity.</p>				
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<p>So, I mean, I really think that a mentoring relationship needs to be something that is integral everywhere in education, period.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:08:03] I like it. And I can see that in your classroom every time I come in. Yeah, I can totally see that the kids are excited about what they're sharing with their learning. And you can tell that they are also empowered. Hmm. I mean, their confidence level at sharing their work is amazing. It is so different in some of us and they're excited to share it, which is I love that I have</p> <p>Rachel: [00:08:26] If there's a structure to it and there's a scaffolding to create whatever we have our project, we create criteria. Yeah, but it's directed by the students, of course, me in the background kind of going, so what do you think about this? You know, but it's directed by them so they have ownership over it so they know what they're working towards. I love it, you know, and that makes them proud of their work and want to put out quality work.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:08:52] That is amazing. I love that. I believe this is our last question. Is there a way that the needs of the high risk students can enlighten us and how to address the needs of all students? If yes, what</p>				
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<p>would you suggest?</p> <p>Rachel: [00:09:12] Yeah, I guess to me, high risk students are just students and everybody comes with their own story and everybody comes with their own background and I think this is the number one thing. I think what we really saw demonstrated in spades during this pandemic, is the need for people to invest money and resources into education to bring our class sizes down. I mean, that's really what it comes down to, you know, so it's not necessarily a high risk student or a gifted student or a disabled student. They're all just students. But we have the ability, with smaller class sizes and better resources to connect and help each of our students move forward. I mean, it was a really tough transition to go from eight students in the hybrid model twice a week to 20 students all of a sudden four days a week. Wow. And some of our students who were high risk, that really just threw them because they had so much one on one attention, in the smaller class, and then all of a sudden now they were fighting for that attention and the noise and the different things that were, you know, detrimental there. I mean, so that to me, that's the number one thing, how can you pull in the resources? And it's like. As a country, we pay so</p>				
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<p>much lip service to how important education is, my mind says then invest in it, agree to invest in it and get us the resources and the people power to allow us more of that mentoring role.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:10:46] Yeah, I agree. I feel like education is the one organization that has not made really important changes. And what the pandemic has taught me throughout this whole thing is that we are adaptive. So why are we still doing the same things? If we look at how we've used technology, what students could not handle the technology only I mean, we really should be looking back through the year and really highlighting what our students actually need as a whole. So. Right, right.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:11:23] And when you look at that, the amount of bodies, you know, how much do you want it to be crowd control and how much do you want it to be actual quality education.</p> <p>DaraLyn: [00:11:30] Agreed. Well, thank you so much. This is amazing. I could talk to you all day.</p> <p>Rachel: [00:11:37] Ah</p>				
<p>Memo</p>				
<p>Rachel and I fully agree that how we deliver education to students needs to change. There</p>				

<p>needs to be appropriate distribution to make classroom sizes smaller and funding should this more so than more canned curriculum or testing. Students show learning when they are invested in the process and not lectured.</p>				
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Appendix D:

Hiring Educators - Administration Interview Questions

Hiring Educators – Administration Interviews

The question that began my research is *"How can alternative educational programming ensure that they are flexible and adaptive while also providing a high-quality learning environment?"*

Through teacher's surveys and student feedback...this statement was shared. *"For the first part, flexible and adaptive qualities and characteristics need to be found in the staff upon hiring. The curriculum needs to be student-centered; teachers should adjust as it is implemented - this requires skilled educators. Informal assessments and traditional assessments can help determine the quality of the learning—observations and feedback from administration will keep curriculum and delivery in check."* JC This now leads me to ask about the hiring process so I turn to Program Directors, Principals and Superintendents for their take on how and what they do to ensure that those hired exhibit these qualities.

1. When interviewing what are you primarily looking for in an educator?
2. How well do you know that the educator you're interviewing has the qualities of flexibility and adaptivity? What do they reveal during the interview process that ensures you that they are a good fit for a classroom?
3. What other characteristics should be required during the hiring process to ensure we're hiring the right team in provide a student-centered environment and high-quality education opportunities for students?
4. What does this thinking mean for the traditional classroom teacher?
5. If the pandemic changed the education system, then should we return to the old way educating students or have we learned that we need to step it up and offer more than canned curriculum to provide proper student learning engagement throughout our schools?
6. The pandemic also revealed a great deal regarding which students that may have been overlooked in a traditional classroom setting. Meaning it forced students to perform remotely to show academic engagement. How will you use this information to evaluate educators and students during classroom observations in the future? How will you use this information in the hiring process in the future?

NOTE: This proved to be nonessential in my research at this time because I was redirected when I wrote the 3 page summary to a new research question.

Appendix E: Action Research Timeline

