Enhancing a New Teacher Mentoring Program for a Catholic High School

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BACKGROUND

Saint Martin de Porres High School finances the education of low-income students through internships at local businesses.

Since opening in 2004, the school has experienced an average annual faculty attrition rate of 22%. Six new teachers joined the faculty for the 2008-2009 school year.

Some of the teachers were new to the profession while others had teaching experience but were new to the Catholic school or inner city setting.

CURRENT STUDY

Mentorship programs benefit from the implementation of more structured interactions between the mentor and new teacher that go beyond providing a buddy style of mentorship based primarily on informal interactions (Norman & Feiman-Nemser).

Purpose Statement:
Strengthen and enhance the existing mentoring program for new teachers

Research Questions:
1. Will structured interactions between the new teacher and mentor improve instructional practice?
2. Do mentoring relationships promote stronger Catholic identity?

METHOD

Sixteen teachers with between one and thirty-eight years of teaching experience participated. Fifty percent identified themselves as Catholic.

Instruments included structured observations and discussions about the Catholic mission of the school. Grounded Theory Design: Qualitative data was collected through focus groups and interviews.

FINDINGS

The new teacher focus group responses were digitally recorded and transcribed. The data analysis utilized a coding process based on a process developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Initial codes were reduced and collapsed into seven codes.

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From the collapsed codes, three themes emerged:
• The mentoring program promoted an emphasis on instructional methods and techniques rather than emotional support.
• The program fostered a collegial environment where informal mentoring routinely took place among faculty members.
• Scheduling issues frequently posed challenges for full implementation of the program.

Descriptive quote:
“I think it is always helpful to have someone come in and observe you and so it is helpful, just having my mentee come in and critique some of the things I was doing. It was refreshing for both of us in the sense that no matter how long you have been teaching you still are going to face somewhat similar issues... If it is year one or year four... we still have similar challenges together.”

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION

Because the program involved a series of structured interactions between new teachers and their mentors, it maintained focus on improving instructional practice rather than simply providing emotional support. The mentoring program also contributed to the creation of a collegial environment, and this proved to be the most valuable outcome of the program as the spirit of collaboration and community served the goal of fostering and enhancing Catholic identity. Fundamentally relational, the mentoring program strengthened the school community and dignified the humanity of each of the community’s members, giving witness to the presence of Christ in each person.

Scheduling issues posed the biggest challenge to full implementation of the program so I have been working in collaboration with the Vice President of Mission to schedule time throughout next school year for the staff to engage in activities designed to examine, reflect, and discuss the Catholic mission of our school.

The school has begun building from our experience with the mentoring program by developing structured mentoring programs for non-teaching positions at the school.

Poster presented at the 2nd Annual ACE Leadership Conference. Address correspondence to Jeff Sutliff, St. Martin de Porres HS, 6111 Lausche Ave. Cleveland, OH 44103 jsutliff@stmdphs.org