The Preparation of Mentors Who Support Novice Teacher Researchers

By Ann Schulte

Lawrence Stenhouse, a curriculum historian, "believed that curriculum development depended neither on specifying new courses of study nor on specifying learning objectives, but on working with teachers as researchers in joint exploration of the processes of teacher-student interaction and learning" (as cited in Somekh & Zeichner, 2009, p. 7). Teacher research has a fairly extensive history as a form of staff development that focuses on reflection and inquiry. Dewey and Schön were perhaps some of the earliest proponents of teachers reflecting on their own practice and developing practical knowledge that would improve one's teaching. In that tradition, there is some very rich literature that draws attention to the important knowledge created by teacher researchers (e.g. Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klehr, & Zeichner, 2007; Hall, Campbell, & Miech, 1997). Action research has been an important part of teacher preparation in many preservice programs (e.g., University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and Teachers College Columbia) and there has been research done to determine the impact of their action research on student teachers' learning (e.g. Arnold, 1992; Kosnik & Beck, 2000). However, self-study of how teacher educators instruct teacher-researchers is limited (Radencich, 1998, as cited in Choi, 2011). Even more rare is research on how teacher educators prepare school-based personnel to support student teacher-researchers.

The Research Question

In my eleven years as a teacher educator at CSU-Chico, I have always used action research and self-study to learn about my own practice. I have also taught both credential and MA students the process of AR, but I had yet to lead a cohort of students in a yearlong study. I was excited about the action research requirement of the newly created Rural Teacher Residency (RTR) program. In this program, teacher candidates (called Residents) earned a teaching credential and a Masters degree in 18 months. As part of the RTR program faculty, I had been given the major responsibility of planning and involving the Mentors (i.e. cooperating teachers) in the Residents' action research process. Therefore, I set out to conduct my own action research to assess the impact of the preparation that I was providing Mentors. I was looking to collect data that would help me to know the success of what had been provided the first year so I could appropriately modify these practices for the following year. My question was: What is the impact of the resources I provide on the ways Mentors perceive their role in this action research process? This paper details the findings from data collected during the first year's cohort and halfway through the second year's cohort.

A Review of the Literature

A number of studies described collaborative action research among student teachers and cooperating teachers (e.g. Catelli, 1995; Friesen, 1994; Wood, 1998; Smagorisnky & Jordahl, 1991), and all of these described inquiry that was shared by the two participants. Wood (1988) documented her action research study alongside her student teacher who was also conducting her own project. Wood viewed herself in this role as helping student teachers select

meaningful questions in the context of her own classroom. She noted that student teachers who conduct action research tended to ask more questions about teaching and she was able to assist them in data collection that leads to better instruction. Wood noted that she was able to communicate more effectively with university supervisors because of the shared language and focus around action research. Wood (1988) wrote that when she and her student teacher were both conducting research they "collaborated extensively and became comfortable sharing our observations and beliefs," and that she felt encouraged in her own work by seeing the progress of her student teacher (p. 16).

Smagorinsky and Jordahl (1991) presented a unique study of their collaborative action research. Smagorinsky and Jordahl were coincidentally both students at University of Chicago in doctoral and M.A.T. programs respectively, and they had similar interests in research about "the arrangement of and interactions between students and teachers" (p. 58). Smagorinsky supported his student teacher (Jordahl) in developing her thesis question and then had a clear role as observer and source of data. No longer "master and apprentice," they worked as peers discussing problems in their teaching and strategizing actions (p. 57). The action research experience resulted in a feeling that "student teachers were already professionals with a capacity for inquiry and much to contribute" (Kosnik & Beck, 2000, p. 131).

Although a number of teacher preparation programs have employed action research as a model for preservice learning about teaching, very few studies examined the impact of a classroom mentor on a student teacher during this process. Rarely have studies specifically addressed the preparation needed for successful mentorship between a classroom teacher and a student teacher who was conducting action research.

In one study that addressed the preparation of mentors, Raisch (1994), the university researcher, conducted a three-day workshop before the school year and continued with weekly meetings with participants. Teachers and student teachers were to conduct collaborative research, however Raisch found that "the research belonged to the teachers and the student teachers were helping to collect data, participating at the level of research assistants" (p. 13). Raisch noted that the partnerships opened communication about teaching and built professionalism, however she observed that the teachers tended to share with one another and student teachers were prone to seeking support from their peers. Particularly unique in this study, the classroom teachers and the university researcher were so enriched by the experience that they continued to meet as an action research group after the student teachers had moved on.

Some studies provided suggestions for how to prepare Mentors but did not study the impact of this preparation per se. For example, Oja (2003) provided examples of self-studies completed by student teachers, supervisors, and cooperating teachers about many different aspects of the student teaching experience, one of which could have been the process of action research. Oja (2003) noted that one of the courses provided to Mentors required them to engage in action research about their role as a mentor. This helped them to develop their skills as a mentor and also gave them participant knowledge about the action research their interns would be conducting. However, this article did not describe how the effectiveness of the preparation was assessed.

In a study by Levin and Rock (2003), the authors analyzed case studies of five novice and experienced teacher pairs to determine the effects of doing collaborative action research. The authors devised themes across the case studies and used them to suggest guidelines for this type of collaborative action research. Levin and Rock (2003) made the following suggestions to support mentor teachers:

1. Provide both preservice and experienced teachers adequate training, and, if possible, give preservice teachers prior experience with action research before they complete a collaborative action research project.
2. Increase ownership and accountability of experienced teachers by setting up informal group presentations and/or formal school presentations of action research projects. In other words, provide a wider audience for

sharing and disseminating the results of action research projects.

3. Establish ways for experienced teachers to receive credit for their efforts by earning professional development or renewal credits from their district, or by earning university credit.

4. Allow action research questions to emerge from the interests and concerns of the experienced veteran teachers and the pre-service teachers and not solely from the university's agenda.

5. Give adequate time and support to the question formulation period and to discussion and assessment of the value and practicality of the action research questions posed. The key is to identify an area of inquiry that assists all the participants to address their immediate needs and to work on their long-term professional goals at the same time.

6. Encourage data-collection strategies that include information gathered from students' perspectives. We say this because additional findings from this study (Rock, 1999) indicated that collecting data from students (e.g., individual interviews, class surveys, student work samples) provides valuable knowledge about students, which appears to help both pre-service and experienced teachers focus (or refocus) on students' needs in the classroom. (p. 148)

The literature has shown that collaborative action research has been a successful tool in learning about teaching. If student teachers are to be successful in learning from this process, it is imperative that school-based personnel are well prepared and that they feel confident in their ability to support classroom-based inquiry. Very little has been written explicitly about how to support cooperating teachers in this work. This study provides findings that may help to serve other programs who are supporting similar collaborative work in their teacher preparation programs.

The Teacher Quality Partnership Grant

The 2009 award of a federal Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant has allowed for the creation of a new structure for preparing teachers at California State University, Chico. The Rural Teacher Residency (RTR) pathway was a 12-month program leading to an initial special or general elementary education credential and a master's degree in education for candidates who were interested in working in high-need rural schools. The program was intended to attract candidates who have extensive prior experience working with children (e.g. paraprofessionals) and those from under-represented populations.

Coursework, including online, campus-based and field-based modes, began in the summer session prior to a full-time academic year residency in a rural school. During the school year, Residents (known as student teachers in the traditional program) continued their coursework, engaged in intensive daily collaboration, co-teaching with their assigned Mentors (similar to cooperating teachers), participated as members of professional learning communities at their school sites, and engaged in site-based inquiry leading to recommendation for a credential and completion of a Master's thesis.

There are a variety of reasons why using action research in the RTR program was prudent. Historically, the primary population of students enrolled in the Masters of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction at CSU, Chico has been practicing teachers in the local area. Faculty in the MA program have designed course work and supervised a number of theses that have used action research as a strategy to promote praxis. Because the new RTR program would require intense study of both educational theory and practice both at the credential and more advanced Masters level, action research was a natural vehicle to align the Resident's learning. Additionally, all new teachers in the state of California were required to complete a state-approved induction program. For most teachers, this was the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program (http://www.btsa.ca.gov/). In recent years, the local BTSA providers have revamped their induction program to include a focus on action research. Therefore, the RTR program assisted these new teachers in transitioning into a reflective process they would likely experience in their first two years as teachers of record.

In addition to providing rigorous teacher preparation, the RTR program was intended to strengthen the school-university partnerships with the participating districts. Through this intensified partnership, with mentor teachers working closely with Residents who were doing inquiry, the action research served as "locally-sponsored systemic reform" (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009, p. 18). Teachers and administrators within the participating districts varied in their knowledge about and experience with action research, however all of them were in some stage of implementing professional learning communities which were believed to promote a climate of inquiry. The focus of the TQP grant was to prepare teachers to meet the needs of high-need rural populations. In this way, action research projects potentially served the "democratic imperative to challenge oppression and nurture and sustain social justice" (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009, p. 6).

Early reports on the residency programs funded by the TQP grant indicated that finding qualified Mentors could be a challenge. Lin Goodwin, the Teachers College associate dean, noted about their mentor selection process, "You can be a great teacher, but working with an adult and trying to articulate what you know to an adult learner—that is a separate process completely" (Sawchuk, 2011). Some experienced mentors may have honed their skills in supporting student teachers in learning to teach, however few have had any experience in guiding student teachers in the process of action research. Therefore, attention to the preparation of Mentors in this area was needed.

The Rural Teacher Residency Program

What follows is a description of the RTR program requirements as they relate to the action research process for the first and second cohorts. Although Residents took numerous courses to meet state Teacher Performance Expectations (for credential) and the requirements of the graduate school (for the MA), primarily those courses and activities directly related to the action research thesis will be detailed here.

In the spring semester before the first RTR cohort began, both Residents and Mentors applied and were interviewed for acceptance into the RTR program. Both groups underwent paper screening and panel interviews by RTR faculty and district liaisons. Mentors were chosen based in seven criteria as described on the Mentor Teacher Job Description:

> Requirements include an appropriate credential that authorizes assignment; minimum three years teaching experience; demonstrated effective classroom practice; inclination toward use of technology within the classroom; willingness to critically examine and reflect on classroom practice and actively engage in relevant professional development; effectively communicate and collaborate with other professional teachers; and commitment to the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) mission.

After selection for both pools was finalized, Residents spent time in their assigned district observing mentor teachers and the two groups got to know one another. These preliminary meetings were to assist university personnel to make successful matches. Although Residents and Mentors may have had early discussions about their shared interests in the classroom, they were unlikely to have serious conversations about the research to be conducted the following year. This is because we encouraged Residents to develop their action research questions from their actual practice with the children with whom they were working at the time.

During the summer, Residents took up to ten units of coursework that would prepare them in foundations for the MA program and for teaching. Prior to beginning the school year, the Residents and Mentors reunited for a one-week workshop in August. In addition to helping Residents and Mentors get to know each other more personally, the workshop addressed topics such as models of co-teaching, professional learning communities, and use of technology in the classroom. Three hours of the week was dedicated to an introduction to action research for both the Residents and the Mentors. During this portion of the workshop, I introduced Residents and Mentors to the concept of action

Table 1: Timeline for Structured Mentor Support and Participation

Year 1: August	October	December	June
Faculty present Action Research (AR) workshop	AR question development with Residents and Faculty, local teacher presents AR	Residents present proposals to thesis committees	Thesis defenses, Y2 Mentors observe
Year 2: August	**October**	**December**	**June**
Y1 Resident presents AR, Y1 Mentors share mentor experience	AR question development with Residents and Faculty, Y1 Resident presents AR data collection	Residents present proposals to thesis committees, Y1 Mentors offer support	Thesis defenses, Y3 Mentors observe

research, they watched a video of teachers talking about doing action research, and they all received a text and access to online resources that were intended to support both of them throughout the following school year.

The Residents continued in the fall with coursework dedicated to facilitating the action research process, while the Mentors returned to campus once in the fall to meet with Residents and their university supervisors to engage in deeper discussions around the Residents' research. During this meeting, a local teacher shared her action research thesis as another model. Mentors were again invited to "follow along" with the Residents by reading their action research text and logging into the online course to use those materials provided to support their role. During the fall, Residents completed the first two chapters of their thesis, which were an introduction to the research question and a literature review. Before the end of the fall semester, Mentors came back to campus and participated in the thesis proposal presentation, serving as an "unofficial" member of the thesis committee. (University restrictions prevent Mentors from being official thesis committee members.) In the spring, Residents continued to work on their remaining chapters, which included their methodology, results, and conclusions. University faculty members continued to support them with periodic group meetings, occasional discussions in the field placement, and online communication. Mentors returned to

participate in the final presentation and defense of the thesis that occurred at the end of the public school year. Mentors and Residents selected for year two attended the spring thesis presentations as a way of familiarizing themselves with the action research process and thesis defense.

Resident Preparation in Action Research

In addition to the summer workshop, Residents attended a 3-unit MA course in the fall semester learning about action research, developing their question, and conducting a literature review related to their topic. The approach to action research was modeled in the traditions of Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1993) and Zeichner (1993). Both Residents and Mentors received the central text, *Living the Questions* (Hubbard & Power, 1999), and were provided supplemental readings and teacher research websites online.

Residents in the RTR program followed the five phases of action research:
Problem identification
Plan of action
Data collection
Analysis of data
Plan for future action

Residents learned data collection methods that included traditionally qualitative data such as interviews, observation, anecdotal notes, student

work, etc. Data analysis instruction included triangulation of data, to ensure process validity, and various methods of coding and memoing, primarily in the tradition of grounded theory. For many of the Residents, data collection and analysis were a new skill. For some of those who came from the hard sciences, reorienting their beliefs about controls and generalizability was challenging. I used Lytle and Cochran-Smith's (1993) concept of RE-searching and the paradigm of action research as a model of learning to teach to keep them focused on the heuristic purposes of the process. Though I met regularly with Residents throughout the fall semester, I saw Mentors less frequently and they were primarily dependent on learning through their Residents or availing themselves of the text or resources online.

Preparation of Mentors: Data Collection

Data included anecdotal notes by me and other university faculty, two videos of meetings with Mentors, fall and spring Mentor surveys, program documents (e.g. Mentors MOU, workshop evaluations, and the RTR handbook), and communications through email/online course. I also participated in a monthly action research support group outside of the university. This group acted as my "critical friend," assisting me in looking at my data and ultimately helping me to develop my conceptual framework. My critical friends' perspectives as former student teachers or cooperating teachers helped to ground my thinking.

Collection of program documents helped to determine what information Mentors received in order to understand their supportive roles in the action research process. The purpose of my research was explained in a letter of consent to the Mentors in this way: "We hope to capitalize on your expertise as classroom teachers and learn from our experiences as we develop the RTR program. Findings from this research will help Mentors to better understand how to support Residents in their action research and will help university faculty to better structure the entire process." The Mentor memo of understanding (MOU) stated that one of the primary responsibilities of the mentor teacher was to "guide, supervise, and instruct Residents,

including service as an MA thesis committee member." Additionally, the MOU stated that Mentors would "actively engage in inquiry to support Residents in action research for the MA, including full action research group meetings one Saturday morning per semester." In the Role Comparisons handout, which Mentors received in their initial interview, the traditional role of the cooperating teacher was contrasted with the RTR Mentor's role. This handout explained that the traditional cooperating teacher has no responsibility regarding action research, however, in the RTR program the Mentor "Works with the [Resident] to identify research focus, gather and analyze data." This role as (unofficial) thesis committee members was reinforced in announcements and reminders for the fall meeting. In a written email reminder and meeting announcements, Mentors were encouraged to read the *Living the Questions* (Hubbard & Power, 1999) text.

Email communications between Mentors and me over the course of 18 months were saved in an Outlook folder. I also used emails to communicate with Residents and to collect their perceptions of their Mentors' roles. These were printed out and were coded for any themes related to the Mentors' role and their use of the materials (e.g. confusion, appreciation). Two meetings where Mentors were present were video taped to support notes that were taken during the meeting. These videos were not transcribed verbatim but contributions and questions by Mentors were specifically noted to corroborate notes taken by two different faculty members. Mentors were surveyed both fall and spring the first year, and again in the fall of the second year in order to help guide programmatic changes to the process. Surveys from the first year were compared with those in the fall of the second year to determine changes in perceptions about the resources provided for the Mentors.

To analyze the data, I used the iterative process of grounded coding. This process includes a "succession of question-and-answer cycles" (Huberman and Miles, 1998, p. 186), which helped to develop patterns within the data. I used the patterns to make sense of themes in the other data sources and to better understand what resources were indicated to be more effective in assisting

Mentors to understand their role in the action research process.

Resources To Support the Action Research Process

Because the action research process was new to most of our Mentors and all of our Residents, RTR faculty sought to provide access to a variety of resources that would assist everyone in producing quality action research that would lead to the Residents' theses. These resources included workshops, a shared textbook, and a variety of online articles and websites that would provide examples of both action research processes and completed studies.

In the first year of the program, all 16 of the Mentors and Residents (eight pairs) seemed quite receptive to the action research workshop in the summer before school started. In the session evaluations, many of the eight Mentors expressed appreciation for a better understanding of the process and how to support Residents. One person noted that she would like more information about how to help her resident. Two comments were "I learned that the best expert is me!" and "Reflection is a key piece of our profession." My goal was to focus on how the process of action research positions the teacher as a knowledge-making professional and it seemed to have accomplished that with at least some of the Mentors. I also stressed that the action research process was not different from learning to teach but one approach to that process.

The ways in which first-year Residents perceived their Mentors' support in question development during the fall semester varied widely. One resident, Josey, explained that her mentor (who had previously earned an MA) was "deliberatively aloof" (email communication, Oct. 24, Josey) and used reflective questioning to help Josey determine her question. Mandy, another Resident, described her Mentor as knowing little about her topic but that her Mentor had hoped to learn more about it from the research (email communication, Mandy, Oct. 24). A third Resident noted that her Mentor's lack of an MA limited her belief that she could help her Resident significantly, though the Resident felt the

Mentor was very supportive (email communication, Callie). Other Residents described various levels of Mentor participation in helping the Resident to craft her question. Sometimes Mentors assisted in wording the question or connecting it to school or district priorities. One Resident described how her Mentor "presented potential obstacles… and possible solutions" (email communication, Oct. 25, Tammy). One resident reported that she used her mentor "more as a sounding board and less as a 'crutch'" (email communication, Oct. 18, Maria). Residents reported that Mentors provided other support such as finding appropriate literature and connecting to other district personnel or data sources. One Resident noted early in that process that it was very important to continually involve her Mentor in her question development because she wanted to be sure her Mentor would both approve of this activity in her classroom and would agree that it would be useful to pursue (email communication, Kathy, Aug. 3).

Through email communications with first-year Residents, three of eight of them noted that their Mentor's experience (or lack of) with a Masters program impacted the ways in which Mentors viewed their ability to support them. Two Residents had Mentors who had an MA or who were obtaining it concurrently; they noted that this provided both of them confidence in helping the Resident with her research. The third Resident noted that her Mentor felt that not having a Masters degree would disadvantage her in helping with the research. My communications with Mentors and their surveys confirmed these perceptions of inadequacy with at least three of the first-year Mentors.

I had believed that if Mentors availed themselves of some of the resources I provided, it would help them to better understand the process and ameliorate any confusion or lack of confidence. I believed that if they understood this process as a way of learning to teach, rather than some activity reserved only for those with a Masters degree, then they would feel more comfortable in that role. Seven of the eight surveys from Mentors in the fall indicated that the three-hour workshop in the summer was helpful. Unfortunately, only half of the Mentors said that they read the text *Living the*

Questions (Hubbard & Power, 1999), but the ones who had, rated it as helpful or very helpful. I was able to see in the online course that most of the Mentors had not accessed the resources online. I was very focused during the first year on trying to give Mentors resources so that they would feel supported and informed. Most of my notes from my own action research support group were focused on how to help Mentors to have more ownership and be more accountable for using these resources (See suggestions from Levin & Rock, 2003).

In a survey question about how Mentors perceived their role in the action research process, the most common responses were "support" and "a sounding board." A number of them also noted that they provided the perspective of a classroom teacher. Only a few Mentors saw themselves as a "questioner." Two Mentors described themselves as "assistants in data collection." Based on my observations of meeting discussions, many Mentors did describe participating in data collection just by nature of participating in the classroom environment, but perhaps they did not relate that to their role in data collection.

In the fall of the second year, both veteran and new Mentors (18 in total) were surveyed about their level of comfort and perceived role when supporting Residents. When Mentors were asked directly about how their support role with action research is like or different from their role in teaching to teach, two Mentors noted that they ask questions for the research process but are more directive in explaining how to teach. Another Mentor described her role in action research as more "laid back," but there was more pressure in teaching to teach so that the students learned the standards. One new Mentor simply wrote on the survey, "it is not in my comfort zone so I am struggling."

One second year Mentor described teaching to teach as broad and including many different things, whereas the action research was a deeper focus on one aspect of that learning to teach. This was exactly the perspective I was trying to communicate with Mentors through our workshops and materials. However, in discussions with some other Mentors, there continued to persist a perception that action research was something separate from "student teaching" and in some cases, it was viewed as intrusive to the student teaching experience.

Revisions in Year Two

Because at least three of the Mentors from year one had expressed some discomfort or lack of confidence in supporting their residents in their research, and because in the second year we would have twelve new Mentors, I wanted to carefully plan how to make resources readily available to them and increase the chances that the Mentors would use them.

All 18 of the second-year Mentors were provided the *Living the Questions* (Hubbard & Power, 1999) text in the summer workshop. More than half of those Mentors indicated on their year-two fall survey that they didn't read the text and only one who read it, rated it as helpful. Instead of enrolling the Mentors in the Residents' online course as I had done the previous year, I arranged to have the online resources available to them through Google Docs. In return for their stipend, the Mentors were being required to regularly log service hours for the grant in a Google Docs document. This relocation of resources was anticipated to assist Mentors in availing themselves of this type of support. Unfortunately, based on the limited number of Mentors who were able to get into Google Docs to log their service hours (as reported by the grant administrator at the end of the fall semester), these resources were unlikely to have been useful.

Second-year Mentors had been invited to attend the previous year's Residents' thesis poster presentations in the preceding spring. During the year-two August workshop, all Mentors were provided a full presentation by one of the year-one Resident completers. Additionally, veteran Mentors met with new Mentors and the follow-up evaluations indicated that new Mentors found this activity extremely helpful. New and veteran Mentors again met in small groups in December after the Residents presented their thesis proposals, at which time new Mentors reported that this was very useful. One Mentor proudly told me that the veteran Mentor not only helped her with understanding her Resident's experience, but the

veteran Mentor also asked for the new Mentor's perspective on her own situation (anecdotal notes).

My anecdotal notes indicated that at the thesis proposal presentations in the second year, veteran Mentors were more likely to ask questions that challenged the Residents' thinking rather than only support or provide context for the study proposal, which was how I had noted their role in the first year. Second-year Mentors were also more likely to offer suggestions to Residents other than their own, demonstrating a higher level of confidence in their experience with the process (anecdotal notes). This provided important modeling for new Mentors as they learned how to participate as a (unofficial) thesis committee member.

Conclusions

When initiating this study, my goal was to learn how the resources I provided to Mentors might support them as their Residents conducted action research in the Mentors' classrooms. The two most significant resources in preparing Mentors to feel confident in supporting their Residents in their action research were 1) experience with the action research process and 2) veteran Mentors and Residents describing their experiences and answering questions. Faculty presentations of information and additional print resources were helpful for some, but according to the surveys, these were the least helpful overall.

What I did not anticipate to find in the data was that many Mentors viewed themselves in different roles when supporting the Residents. The figure describes the differences between the Mentors' role in supporting the "student teacher" and supporting the "Masters candidate." The primary focus of the Mentor teachers was in preparing the Resident to become a competent and confident teacher; the Mentors expressed in many meetings the critical need for the Residents to be in the classroom and teaching. Mentors were less strident when advocating for time for the Residents to complete their research (as indicated through personal communications) even though these two activities largely overlapped. The Mentor's support role in the action research process was usually demonstrated as secondary, perhaps over-shadowed by their perceived role in the student teaching process.

On the whole, I perceived that Mentors viewed their confidence and comfort as a "master teacher" in the student teaching relationship to be more in line with that of the faculty supervisor. However, when it came to their confidence or comfort in supporting the Resident in the thesis work, some of them viewed themselves to be more in line with the Resident. In the figure above, the arrow on the left indicates that how the Mentors perceived their comfort in supporting Residents could vary according to their prior experience with action research, their own completion of an MA, and their knowledge about the topic of the Resident's action research (as indicated in surveys and in email communications).

It is my vision that action research will not only help Residents learn to teach and provide Mentors a new way of thinking about teaching, but that this process will begin to develop a culture of confidence in the schools. Teachers and schools are commonly blamed and called failures, but widespread action research can be part of the transition into taking back our roles as the experts in the classroom. It provides a structure that empowers teachers to share their knowledge and take ownership of directing the curriculum and instruction in our schools. This quote, even though it was written in 1988, sums up my vision for the use of action research in the preparation of teachers:

There never has been such a need for the teaching profession to go public, either in a political sense, with appraisal, accountability, disputes about pay and conditions, all contributing to present the image of a profession afraid and weak; or in a moral sense, when we are poised on the brink of great sociological changes, such that the teaching professional could take a vigorous lead in determining the future…the greatest revolutions start with individuals, and this teaching revolution must start with the individual teachers in their own classrooms who are attempting to make sense of their own practice (McNiff, 1988, p. 52-53).

Introducing practicing teachers to the process of action research and institutionalizing its use in teacher preparation programs can help to lead to "locally-sponsored systemic reform" (Somekh and

Figure 1

Perceived Comfort of the Mentor in a Support Role
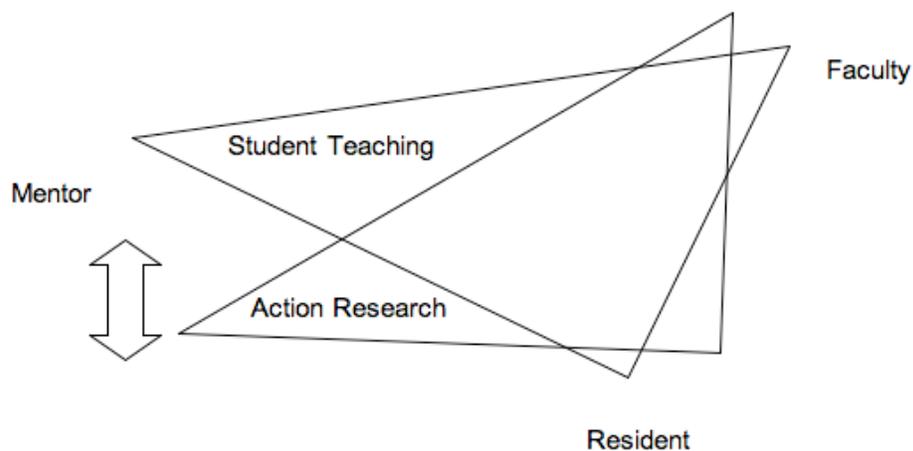
Zeichner, 2009, p. 18). In order for this approach to take hold, teacher educators need to have a better understanding of how school-based personnel are prepared to support student teachers in the process. Also, more research should be done to examine how Mentors perceive their roles in using the action research process in teaching to teach.

Because the Residents in our RTR program were required to write the thesis independently, we have shied away from calling the research "collaborative," however we know that significant collaboration takes place. A topic to explore in future years is the extent of Mentors' engagement in the action research. Some Mentors have expressed an interest in doing their own action research, particularly if it were part of their own Masters program. One Mentor who was enrolled in our Masters program formulated an action research question that studied her role as a Mentor in the RTR program. Findings from her study would inform the work presented here.

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