

tele mentor

journal of the international telementor program

Hard Work Pays Off

UNC Charlotte
Researchers
**Study
ITP**

Teachers &
Administrators
**SPEAK
OUT**

Appreciation
from a
6th Grader



ITP EXAMINED!

The International Telementor Program
goes under the microscope.
What did researchers find?

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WHY ACADEMIC MENTORING WORKS

From the Founder Hard Work Pays Off



David Neils, a former Hewlett-Packard software developer, founded ITP in 1995.

The quality of student work that I've witnessed in the program over the last two years has been nothing short of stellar, especially at Preston Middle School in Fort Collins, Colorado. I've seen work from average 6th-grade students that I've never seen from a gifted senior. Never.

And now we have solid evidence that shows ITP is an effective way to deliver authentic learning to students and help them gain skills applicable in the real world, thanks to an evaluation of the program by Dr. Chance Lewis of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

For example, Whitney Harris, a bubbly middle school student back in 1998 is now a teacher in an urban

St. Louis, Missouri, school who is bringing our program to inner city youth. She wants her students to have the same opportunities she did that are now paying off as she pays it forward.

I had a feeling for the first 16 years of the program that this level of student work was possible. Now I'm simply celebrating with students, teachers, and mentors.

For Youth,

David Neils,
ITP Founder & Director

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The International Telementor Program (ITP) facilitates electronic mentoring relationships between professional adults and K-12 and college students worldwide to achieve authentic work in core subject areas and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), plus unprecedented education and career planning. Since 1995, more than 46,000 students throughout nine countries have been served.

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Dr. Chance Lewis
evaluates ITP

ITP Examined. SUCCESS, Challenges Revealed.

“What most intrigued me was the utilization of mentors all across the world to support the process of learning that was customized for each student.”

The International Telementor Program (ITP) makes learning authentic and applicable to real life. The United States Department of Education, National Mentoring Partnership, America’s Promise, and many other education and mentoring organizations recognize ITP as a leader in academic mentoring.

ITP pairs students in middle school through post secondary with mentors from companies that sponsor the program. Mentors support students to tackle real STEM challenges where collaboration with industry professionals is paramount, the quality of student work is unprecedented, and students develop solid professional networks, even before high school. Unheard of. Students also receive some of the best career and education planning in the world.

David Neils, ITP founder and director, explained: “We work with all students, including gifted and talented students and students in the middle who rarely receive extra attention. All students who are not intrinsically motivated to learn are operating far below their potential. I am very fortunate to get to see each day that mentors and rela-

tionships are catalysts for student action or that student actions can be the catalysts for the formation of new relationships and mentor/protege relationships. Some days, a mentor in California helps an autistic student in Louisiana with a passion for the logical systems that run computers to develop a career and education plan. Other days, a shy student in Louisiana takes a plan he made with his mentor from Pennsylvania to share with the hiring manager of a local grocery store.”

To understand just how effective ITP is, Dr. Chance W. Lewis, director of The Urban Education Collaborative in the College of Education at The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Charlotte, evaluated the program. He and his colleague, Dr. Bettie Ray Butler, assistant professor of urban education in UNC’s College of Education, surveyed ITP teachers, mentors and students who participated in the program from October 2010 to November 2012.

Lewis first learned of ITP when he worked at Colorado State University in the early 2000s. “I had an opportunity to work on an initial evaluation of the project at

that time,” he said. “What most intrigued me was the utilization of mentors all across the world to support the process of learning that was customized for each student. My evaluation was not part of a larger study; I was brought on as a consultant to independently evaluate the impact of the program. It is my hope that my evaluation reports are used to continue to enhance the impact of the ITP program, because not only did I evaluate the data but I provided recommendations based on results for future improvement.”

Lewis queried participants about a variety of issues related to the ITP mentoring experience, like effectiveness, mentor match quality and the helpfulness of ITP staff. When all the responses are boiled down, rich kernels of evidence remains documenting ITP’s strengths and weaknesses.

Survey results provided quantitative and qualitative data. Sixteen teachers, 428 mentors and 482 students participated in the evaluation. Lewis said he “used a range of methodologies to examine the extensive datasets for the ITP

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Evaluation Summary

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program ranging from basic descriptive statistics to stepwise linear regression models.”

Overall, teachers mentors and students “...reported a positive experience...” after participating in the ITP program. All groups said the program helps students “...navigate their academic journey though their secondary school experience with firm aspirations for pursuing post-secondary options and careers after their educational attainment.”

Impact & Successes

Teachers reported that ITP helped students improve their social skills, specifically teamwork, critical thinking and written communication. They also noted an increase in students’ desire to become proactive, self-directed learners, knowledge of the workplace and integration of knowledge across subjects.

An anonymous teacher comment made on the survey said: “The students learned the importance of good communication and its impact on achievement of goals. They also learned about meeting deadlines and the consequences that may result from not meeting those deadlines – a very important lesson to learn before entering the workplace.”

Another noted that “students had to think in the program, solve problems and collaborate...[They] engage in deep thought about their work and at a deep level of learning.”

The majority of mentors agreed with teachers that students’ written com-

munication skills improved, as well as their research skills. Mentors also reported student improvement in the areas of collaboration with others and time management. Additionally, they felt students gained an awareness of how to build a professional support network and an understanding of the professional work environment.

The most rewarding aspect of participating in ITP for one mentor was “seeing the personal development and passion of the student as she sought knowledge and a method of presenting it.”

While both teachers and mentors emphasized how much students improved their communication skills, a little less than half (49.8%) of the students surveyed said they felt their writing skills improved, but 65% did report they have a better understanding about why they need to be good at reading and writing. And most students said ITP helped them improve in the area of teamwork.

One student said, “The best part of the telementor program is it gives us a chance to learn how to communicate with professionals in our fields of interest.”

Challenges & Improvements

An endeavor wouldn’t be authentic if it didn’t present challenges. And challenges would be pointless unless they are seen as opportunities for improvement. While most ITP participants give the program high marks in most survey categories, they also noted legitimate issues that should

be addressed to improve program outcomes.

As noted above, teachers and mentors feel ITP impacts student learning in several areas. Teachers, however, did not feel the program helped increase standardized tests scores, or improve subject grades or math and science comprehension. Mentors agreed that students’ math and science comprehension didn’t increase significantly, but stressed that improvement in these areas still occurred.

A resounding theme in the improvement department dealt with technology. One teacher said, “Access to technology is prohibitive for us. Though there is a telementoring laptop cart, there are 15 laptops and some classes have 30+ students.”

Another echoed those sentiments by saying, “Availability of the telementoring computers was a large issue... One of the main reasons many of the teachers on campus have elected to not do a project is [due to this issue].”

Students agreed and consistently noted they needed more access to computers at school. They also had issues with ITP’s website and thought using technology other than email would make the program better.

A teacher said, “...our students would like to...connect with their mentors on Facebook. It’s such a part of their lives, they don’t fully understand why they can’t become

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Teachers, Administrators ***SPEAK OUT*** *About ITP*

In trying to understand the value added to student learning by the International Telementor Program and to augment the survey responses received through their study, Dr. Chance W. Lewis, director of The Urban Education Collaborative in the College of Education at The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Charlotte, and his colleague, Dr. Bettie Ray Butler, assistant professor of urban education in UNC's College of Education, solicited open-ended comments from the administrators and teachers involved with ITP at Preston Middle School in Fort Collins, Colorado. Following are uncensored statements from those conversations organized around topical questions.

Q: What do students gain from mentoring relationships in general and from ITP specifically?

Rachael Browning, Gifted and Talented coordinator/teacher: "The Telementor Program has served as a valuable and meaningful resource for students at Preston Middle School. This collaborative program assumes the role of added assistance for teachers and students, by offering up extra support. I have observed many of my students' mentors encourage greater depth, complexity and sophistication of bigger, more purposeful ideas. With mentors acting as a rudder, students are inspired to extensively conceptualize and reflect with intent... The affective support evident in fostering a positive mentor relationship has been proven to be unquestionably beneficial to youth. Furthermore, many of my students are motivated to do "real" work based on the relational connection cultivated with their mentor. My students are energized to go the extra mile and have become intrinsically driven to become a creative producer, rather than simply chasing the dangling 'A.'"

Amy Schmer, 6th-grade science teacher: "There are MANY benefits of the ITP program. Several of them are student engagement, level of understanding and ownership of the knowledge, sense of confidence..."

Throughout the last two years, the confidence in the students that are in the ITP class have grown so much more than other 6th graders. The students in the ITP class are not afraid to make a phone call to professionals, write a letter/email to an expert, ask tough questions of other students and adults, share their thoughts and ideas to different groups of people... Student engagement in my ITP class is out of this world... I have also noticed that the attendance rate in that class is higher than any other class I teach. The students' level of understanding and ownership of the knowledge in my ITP class is very evident. Students from last year can recall information and facts from different classes, guest speakers and field trips. Those students are using the knowledge from their ITP class to improve and create answers to real problems this year. Those students understand that interviewing professionals and having an authentic audience will make their work better and more important. The students are not happy to just do work for their teacher. They have done work that is meaningful and understand that this type of work is very self satisfying."

"I have observed many of my students' mentors encourage greater depth, complexity and sophistication of bigger, more purposeful ideas. With mentors acting as a rudder, students are inspired to extensively conceptualize and reflect with intent..."

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Cameron Shinn, 6th-grade English teacher: “By having students engage in constant communication, writing with a purpose and an audience, as well as collaborating constantly with their mentor, students are always improving their writing. With the amount of reflective thought that is required and the amount of self-evaluation, students are learning how to consider more than one perspective, more than one idea, and more than one way of doing things. All of these things lead to better learners. Allowing students the space to collaborate with professionals, not teachers or students, but professionals, there is a different investment on part of the students: the work they produce feels real, relevant, and that it will not just receive a grade and be tucked away in the box of forget. It has purpose for these students.”

Tracy Winey, media specialist: “My experience with ITP has been amazing... We had students located in two places: Fort Collins, Colorado, and Dumaguete, Philippines. Within 24 hours all of our students had mentors who spoke their native language!

This was huge because our students in the Philippines had to translate every word doc and conversation when working with the Fort Collins students and it was time consuming and difficult for them. To have mentors communicate in their native language allowed them to focus on researching and proposing solutions.”

Q: How does ITP benefit teachers and staff?

Scott Nielsen, principal: “I’ve been excited to see the support that ITP has provided to Preston Middle School. During my many years in education, I have never been able to find a scalable model for providing a large number of mentors for a large population of students. ITP has provided quality support for many of our students and created a capacity to challenge the thinking beyond the classroom walls. The program has helped us to create an environment that allows students to see both how they can make their world better and collaborate with professionals, who are themselves, contributing to making the world better. The work with ITP has also provided an avenue to participate in

authentic work and produces real results.”

John Howe, assistant principal, STEM Institute director: “The connection of professionals to Preston students is of such high importance that Preston has built it into its STEM School Model a ‘Professional Networking/Mentoring’ component. The importance of real world, problem-based learning for this generation cannot be overemphasized. This generation is highly altruistic and motivated to make a positive difference and working with mentors on solutions to big problems is the best way to keep them engaged in learning and being socially responsible. When Preston set out to become a world-class STEM middle school, we recognized early that our internal efforts to obtain and manage mentors for our students were not scalable. ITP became the only realistic, high-quality option.”



Schmer: “Finding 33 mentors to work with my students would be impossible for me to do on my own. ITP has taken all of that work off of my shoulders and I truly have 33 mentors who are invested in my students and their project. The

mentors message my students all the time and their messages are full of different teaching points. The mentors email me asking about their students. If they have not received a message, the mentor will contact me and ask if the student is okay, can I share any info about their student that will help the mentor send more effective messages. When I read the messages that are sent by mentors and students I feel like I have struck gold being partnered with ITP.”

Shinn: “If I were to try and find all of these mentors for one class of students, let alone all of my classes, it would be a full-time job. There is no way a teacher could do this and teach. It would be impossible. Through ITP, my students are able to collaborate, problem-solve, and get the kind of one-on-one necessary for them to be pushed as individuals and make great strides.”

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ITP Examined

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‘friends’ with the people they’ve been studying with for three months.”

Facebook and verbal communication came up several times when students were asked how their ITP experience could be improved. One student wrote: “A communication with my mentor on Facebook or a phone number just to say hi and hello.”

The following comments express the additional technological changes and choices they think would enhance ITP:

“Some things are hard to communicate through online messages only. I wish that I could actually talk to my mentor.”

“My difficulty is being near a computer. It would be nice if there was a free cellphone app to access [the telementor website]...Also I think it would be much appreciated if the website had a logout button and wouldn’t automatically log you out if you went to the home page.”

“I would like to somehow contact [my mentor] through my personal email.”

“...a suggestion I have for the future was maybe to include video messaging. That way kids could see what their mentors look like, be able to show their mentors parts of their project, and it would be kind of fun, too.”

Changes in the Making

The people have spoken and Founder/Director Neils is listening.

“Based on this evaluation, we will spend more of our time training and supporting teachers to incorporate authentic learning opportunities in the core subjects,” Neils said. “Great teachers create learning environments where students can get traction with their interests and natural abilities, develop strong and active professional networks, and make real contributions.” 🌍

Teachers Speak Out

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Q: Would the method of learning that ITP provides benefit all students?

Nielsen: “I would love to see a time where ALL students have access to this type of support. I believe it provides richness to learning that may often be missed without this environment. We talk in education often about preparing students to be post-secondary ready, what better way than to collaborate with those professionals that we are preparing students to work alongside!”

Schmer: “I would love for every Preston student to get the chance to experience the type of education that my ITP classes have experienced. When students that do not have a mentor ask students that do have a mentor what it is all about, the non-mentor student says, ‘I wish I had one of those.’”

Shinn: “I would love it if each teacher in this school had one Telementoring class. I think for every child to have the opportunity to pick a topic they were interested in, really learn about it, invest not in an assignment, but in themselves, would be a great experience. It is not just a great experience for kids, but one for teachers as professionals.” 🌍

“I would love to see a time where ALL students have access to this type of support. I believe it provides richness to learning that may often be missed without this environment.”

Appreciation from a 6th Grader...

The sentiments expressed in an email from a Preston Middle School 6th-grade student, to her mentor, Brian Egan, from Corvallis, Oregon, sums up the impact ITP has on students' learning. Brian has mentored over 130 students in the last 10 years. Megan's project focused on improving habitat for grizzly bears in North America.

Hi Brian!

We've been listening to everyone present their final product. Two of the best presentations I've seen have been on bullying and criminal psychology. I almost cried during the bullying presentation. Not because it was sad! It was amazing, and totally relate-able. But I guess that is kind of sad in its own way.

Thank you so much for helping me become a better learner and a better thinker. I will always remember how much you helped me grow in only one semester! All the skills that you have taught me and the countless writing, thinking, and project tips, I will never ever forget. Without you, this wouldn't be possible. Everything we've done together will help me in the future. And, hey! Forget the future! I'm using all of the skills I learned in my Science Grand Challenge right now.

You have helped me learn to begin with the end in mind and to visualize before I start. You have taught me that any change is possible, even for a 6th grader; some of the most encouraging words ever. I will (and I am right now) educating everyone I know, not only relevant things I know about grizzlies, but the tips that you have given me.

Thank you so much for helping me find pieces of myself I never knew existed.

*Sincerely,
Megan*



Preston Middle School 6th graders shine after successfully leading a tour for natural resources professionals that showcased their wildlife habitat improvement project at Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch.