MENTOR –APPRENTICESHIP ROLES IN A SELECTION OF YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

by

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Abstract

The apprenticeship model has been historically dominant in the education systems of various cultures in the last three thousand years. As a result, many children’s and Young Adult novels, especially in the genres of historical fiction and fantasy, incorporate master and apprentice themes. With this in mind, I seek to analyze the teaching depicted in two YA novels based on apprenticeship: The Last Apprentice and The Ranger’s Apprentice. Due to the international popularity of these novels, many children and young adults worldwide are exposed to the books’ messages about teaching and about education. Informed by current educational research, I have developed a best practice lens including four aspects: the teacher as an individual, curricular scope, instructional practices, and assessment. This thesis examines the teaching practice of the masters in each novel using this best practice lens. I found that while not always perfect, the two masters follow many elements of best practice teaching, resulting in student/apprentice success.
Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Claire George.
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For Dad, who let me run ahead

but was always there when I turned back to look.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My father spent the Saturdays of my childhood at the local public library. Every week, he would visit the children’s section and painstakingly peruse dozens of picture books, and later, novels, carefully selecting a handful of books to bring home to his daughter. Invariably, these were works I would not have chosen myself; works that would challenge my reading level or worldview, works that were classic or award winning; works that concerned neither baby-sitters clubs nor ponies. I later realized that this was his way of teaching me a love of reading and an appreciation of literature.

The success of his lesson is obvious in both my program of study and my career path. As an elementary classroom teacher, a teacher-librarian, and a vice-principal, I have had the pleasure of interacting daily with children’s literature and enjoying the wonder and learning that children receive from stories. As a result of these personal and professional experiences, children’s literature and education are intertwined in my thinking.

My own childhood reading preferences, and that of my current students, show the correlation between identifying with stories and enjoying them. I loved to read about children like me; my students also love to read about children like themselves and, in particular, connect to stories about school and learning. As a child, I loved reading about schools like mine, or about girls like me, and their education experiences. Kit Pearson’s The Daring Game (set in my own elementary school), Roald Dahl’s Matilda, and L. M. Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables series all satisfied my thirst for stories about school. As a teacher-librarian, I saw the same enthusiasm in my students, evidenced in the high circulation numbers for Sachar’s Wayside School books, Allard and Marshall’s Miss Nelson
books, and the *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* series, both of which centre on the boarding school experience.

Children are also exposed to texts that depict educator-learner relationships outside of the modern classroom framework. In particular, I have noticed the popularity and critical acclaim of novels about apprenticeship, both in the context of fantasy and of historical fiction. This is not surprising, considering the recent nature of widespread formal schooling compared with the ancient tradition of the apprenticeship model. Therefore, when writing about daily lives before the 1800s, historically accurate authors portray children learning from a master, either a parent or other community expert. Cushman’s *The Midwife’s Apprentice* and Park’s *A Single Shard* are both examples of popular, Newbery award-winning works that centre on the apprentice/master education model.

Through my graduate studies, I have become increasingly interested in the messages portrayed in children’s literature and in the lessons and ideas children glean from books. As an education professional, I am cognizant of societal perspectives on education and sensitive to misinterpretations of the school system. Though some books about school and learning depict fanciful versions of school for the purpose of humour, others unintentionally represent unrealistic or destructive teacher-student relationships (Hildebrand, 1986; Neimi et al., 2010; Barone et al, 1995; Triplett & Ash, 2000).

Last year, I read the first book of the *Ranger’s Apprentice* series aloud to my grade seven class. In it, John Flanagan tells the story of a teenage orphan named Will who ends up apprenticed to a Ranger, a member of the kingdom’s elite intelligence force. Will learns much about himself as he learns the Ranger skills of vigilance, observation, archery, and strategy. The parallels my students drew between Halt, the master Ranger, and me, their
classroom teacher, fascinated me. I found myself quoting Halt’s Socratic rhetorical questioning and sarcastic mannerisms. On the request of my class, I even consented to dress as Halt for our school Halloween festivities.

As a graduate student and an educator, this led me to consider the nature of Halt’s instruction in these novels. From there, I began to consider the wider portrayal of learning shown in apprenticeship novels in general. I began to question the teaching that takes place in these books and the methods used by the master-teachers. While some scholarly writing has been published concerning the depiction of teachers and learners in children’s literature, there has been very little analysis of the teaching-learning relationship in apprenticeship novels.

Through an examination of research in education, I set out to develop a set of strands that summarize current best practices in teaching with the intention of using this criteria as a lens through which to analyze the teaching practice shown in apprenticeship novels.

1.1 Background to the Problem

1.1.1 Changing practices/theories on teaching and learning

Throughout history societies have sought to educate their people to produce goods and services, to respond effectively and creatively to their environment, and sometimes, to satisfy their curiosity and aesthetic impulses.


However, ideas about how best to educate individuals have undergone remarkable change over the course of history. Education is a fluid and evolving aspect of society, and as such, the fundamentals of what constitutes “good instruction” transform over time. For the purposes of this study, I focus on modern notions of education and best practice that began
to appear in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and while I look at best practice in general, I offer examples of evolving best practice in literacy education as well as in general approaches to teaching.

In the years before the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, teachers were considered infallible givers of knowledge, and students were passive receivers of facts. This approach to teaching and learning had the following features:

- Students learn as a result of instruction so they should be instructed in what to learn
- Goal oriented learning
- Goals are structured into a learning hierarchy

In such classrooms, students were required to master a body of information and basic competencies gradually moving from less to more complex skills. Reading instruction at this time was focused on teaching children the code and then letting them read. Little attention was given to helping children with reading comprehension.

However, driven by the conviction that traditional methods of schooling were failing, in the 1920’s John Dewey developed a pedagogy based on human contact with everyday life.

Dewey recognized the existence of individual differences, and introduced the idea that educational performance was probably largely a function of students’ interests.


Thus, good teaching became more than fact loading; teachers were expected to educate a well-rounded future citizen. Progressivists believed that education should be an enriching progress of ongoing growth and, ideally, should blend the home, workplace, and school to generate a continuous and fulfilling learning experience. This is evidenced in the
Seven Cardinal Principals published by the National Education Association in 1918, summarized below:

1. Health

2. Command of fundamental processes (reading, writing, arithmetic)

3. Worthy home membership – including wholesome relations between males and females, “household and homemaking arts” for girls

4. Vocation – exploring aptitudes and learning skills for a livelihood

5. Civic education – functioning as members of society, discussing international problems, democracy, and other nations

6. Worthy use of leisure – fostering art, music, drama, and appreciation of nature

7. Ethical character – moral values and spirit of service (Scherer, n.d.)

While the Progressive movement focused more on student interest and what science was learning about teaching and learning, the focus in reading became increasingly centered on targeted reading skills. This period saw the emergence of the basal reader. The basal reader consisted of a graded series of books that included stories that emphasized the sounds of letters in words.

Behaviourist learning theory, first popular in the early twentieth century, had its roots in the work of Pavlov and Skinner and emphasized responding to positive and negative behaviors in order to reinforce through conditioning (Schugurensky, 2011). This movement illustrates the shift from the learning of facts to the process of learning and a resulting shift in the role of the teacher from that of a disseminator of information/knowledge to a facilitator of learning responsible for both delivery and retention of student knowledge.
In the 1950s the Dick and Jane basal readers published by Scott Foresman shifted from stories that emphasized the sounds of letters in words to a whole word approach to reading where words were repeated on each page enough times that, according to behaviorist research, students would remember these repeated words or, to put it another way, develop a sight vocabulary.

The 1960s saw a number of groundbreaking educational publications. Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1965) highlighted different levels of questioning and the importance of advanced critical thinking skills over recall and repetition. John Goodlad’s *The Non-Graded Elementary School* (1963) emphasized different rates of learning and students’ individuality and personal progress. Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language* (1962) introduced scaffolding and the idea that best practice is encouraging what a child can do independently by identifying what they are able to do with some support. In addition, the idea of a “learning disability” was outlined by Samuel Kirk (Schugurensky, 2011). Notions of effective teaching now identified the importance of prior knowledge linkages, problem solving, the discovery method, mnemonics, and the active construction of each students’ personal organization of knowledge. This was reflected in the language experience approach to teaching, which focused on wholistic reading instruction based on students’ interests and needs (Teale, 116).

Piaget’s influential *The Science of Education* (1970) introduced discovery-based teaching. Exploration, the “learning cycle” model, and concept invention were now included in best practice. Student inclusion was another focus during the 1970s. Teachers were now expected to meet diverse student needs in every classroom. Rulings regarding aboriginal education and the right to schooling for students with intellectual disorders
influenced both the populations of classrooms as well as what and how curriculum was taught. Additionally, the demographics of North American schools were changing. English Language Learners were present in growing numbers. This increasingly diverse, multilingual, multicultural classroom community began to be reflected in children’s and young adult novels (Teale, 119). In addition, the “language experience” approach to reading instruction further emphasized the need for literacy programs based on students’ individual needs.

Out of this new approach emerged the whole language philosophy of education, which centered on real reading and writing experiences instead of phonics and basal readers. This perspective or educational theory derives from several kinds of research: research demonstrating the psycholinguistic and social nature of the reading process, research demonstrating how children acquire language and how learning to read and write is similar to learning the basic structures of the language as children learn to talk; and research on how humans learn concepts and ideas. In fact, one way of characterizing whole language is to say that it is a "constructivist" view of learning, with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. (Accessed at: http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/08894/08894f6.html)

Though there remained a debate in educational circles about the priority weighting of phonics vs. comprehension, literacy learning was becoming more holistic and based on higher interest authentic literature. Small group reading instruction, differentiated based on student ability, was seen as a key aspect of effective teaching at this time.

Best practice theories in the 1980s and 1990s were furthered by publications such as Madeline Hunter’s *Mastery Teaching* (1982). Written by an experienced teacher, this book
outlined steps of effective instruction, such as stating lesson objectives, the anticipatory set, and the gradual release of responsibility from direct instruction to guided practice to independent practice.

Three more publications during this time highlighted the spectrum of different needs that strong educators should be addressing. Howard Gardner’s *Multiple Intelligences Theory* (1983) introduced the idea of a broad range of aptitudes best served in a classroom by an equally broad range of activities, and portfolio-based assessment. Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence (1995) prioritizes the explicit teaching of awareness and management of emotions. Mary Gordon’s *Roots of Empathy* program (1996) further emphasized the importance of social-emotional learning through empathy and inclusion. In addition, the release of Microsoft Windows 1.0 brought awareness of the possibilities that technology integration would bring to education. Throughout this time, multiculturalism, English Language Learners, and mainstream inclusion of all students with special needs increasingly influenced best practice.

Since the beginning of standardized education in the Western world, there has been research and debate about what constitutes “best practice” in teaching. As our society has evolved both in scope of knowledge and in demographic, educational priorities have also shifted. The past 100 years of educational research, coupled with modern needs and tools, brings forward many differing viewpoints about the details of best practice. For the purpose of this paper, current approach to best practice will be examined according to four domains:

1. The Educator as an Individual
2. Nature of Learning Experiences/Methods of Instruction
3. Curricular Scope
4. Role and Methods of Assessment

Through a review of current publications concerning education, this paper develops an extended definition of modern best practice. This then forms a lens for closer examination of the efficacy of apprentice-master education, as depicted in modern children’s literature.

1.1.2 History of apprenticeship

The apprenticeship model has been a dominant aspect of education for thousands of years. While Western society thinks of childhood learning in the context of organized, public, and mandatory schools, this type of education is a relatively new phenomenon. This is not to say that formal elementary schools and universities did not exist in the past, but rather, that they were meant for a small portion of rich or politically significant families. In European universities of the 15th century, for example, instruction was carried out in Latin, a language that was inaccessible to most of the population at that time (Long, 104). Schools for younger children were equally elite. Enrolling teen-age pupils as early as 1440, Eton was seen as the pinnacle of youth schooling in Britain. However, not only was Eton socially and financially exclusive, it also had a reputation for excessive holidays, questionable moral behaviour, and limited academic focus (Aldrich, 98). Alternatives for the poor included church-based systems such as the French parish schools of the 1660s, which were rudimentary and almost exclusively focused on religious education (De Munk, 50). In Britain, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that a regulated elementary level education became available for all children (Aldrich, 1, Aughterson, 198, De Munk, 6).

As a result of the disparity in formalized education, the majority of children and youths living between Neolithic times and the nineteenth century received an education
through apprenticeships, either formal or informal (Long, 72). In ancient western civilizations, children would learn the craft of their parents or another adult artisan through observation, verbal instructions, and years of practice. Babylonian craft documents from the 6th century BCE attest to the tradition of transmitting skills and professions to family members or in many cases, friends and adopted heirs. Though scanty, written evidence from this time suggests that this practice in Mesopotamia dates back much earlier. *The Code of Hammurabi* of approximately 2250 BCE outlines the responsibility of a father to teach his craft to his son and to any other young men taken into the household (Glotz, 130).

Documents from ancient Greece and the Roman Empire further illuminate the apprenticeship tradition. In his early twentieth century study, Westerman (1914) examines a series of contracts from the 3rd century BCE. His findings indicate a pattern of typical rules and practices in ancient apprenticeship. Tradition dictated that the master or teacher (these words were used interchangeably) was obligated to provide the apprentice or student with training in a craft such as weaving, baking, and smithing, as well as food, clothing, and occasionally lodging, in exchange for the labour and obedience of the apprentice for a fixed period between six months and five years. Apprentices were almost entirely male and between 11-14 years of age upon the commencement of their education. This was a “fully developed system... of obligatory contracts,” (Westerman, 307) including fines for abandonment or ill treatment and stipulations for the paying of trade taxes. Both Plato’s *Republic* (c 380 BCE) and the writings of Lucian (c 150 CE) discuss apprenticeship policies, expectations, and complaints. Lucian himself was apprenticed to his sculptor uncle for one day before quitting to pursue rhetoric (Garnsey, 49). Plato explains the importance of quality work and instruction from artisans, as a poor craftsman “will produce shoddier
works, and he’ll make worse craftsmen of his sons or any other he teaches” (Bloom, 421). Though most written evidence from this time is understandably focused on a more literate and formally schooled upper class, there is sufficient documentation to indicate that the majority of young men in these ancient civilizations learned through an apprenticeship modality.

This trend continued in the Middle Ages in England and continental Europe. Again, documentation of work is scarce during this time; however, excavations of York show evidence of specialized craftsmanship requiring extensive training as early as the 900s (Corfield, 33). Though many artisans at this time were serfs who manufactured goods in order to pay rent, the rise of a money economy and craft guilds in the 11th century led to the formation of a middle class of artisans who employed assistants and apprentices. As merchants and artisans all over Europe formalized the guild system, rules about apprenticeship became more standardized. In exchange for the work of the apprentice and a fee that varied according to the prestige of the craft, a master was expected to provide room and board as well as training in all aspects of his craft. Scholars generally believe that the caliber of education in these apprenticeships was very high:

[T]he apprentice found in the master a rough and stern teacher, who gave him a careful and virile education, and one of such high value that the working classes have never at any period had a better technical preparation for the fulfillment of their function. (Boissonade, 213)

There is some variation in the nature of apprenticeships during this time, however, most young men began their training between the ages of 12-14 and served from four years in 14th century Germany and Austria to seven years in England (De Munk, 18). The York
Memorandum Books of 1376-1419 indicate a variety of apprenticeships in both manual and professional occupations that were regulated by guilds. Serving an apprenticeship was a pre-requisite to becoming a master in a guild. In addition, apprentices were required to complete a final project demonstrating their skills (a “master-piece”) and pay guild entry fees (Fitz, 34, Aldrich, 195). In many European craft guilds, entry was highly regulated, and an apprenticeship would be considered invalid if not approved by the guild. Though entrance fees were reduced for the sons of guild masters, documents from the Netherlands in the 15th century show that the majority of apprenticeships were not hereditary. However, this could be a result of masters neglecting to formally register their own sons as apprentices (De Munk 98, 172).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, apprenticeships in all crafts became more standardized as legislation began to supersede guild rules. In France, a royal edict from 1691 required all apprenticeship contracts to be signed by registered guild officers. In England, the 1563 Statute of Artificers legalized regulations that had been in practice for centuries. The Statute required written indentures and a minimum seven-year period for all apprenticeships. The document set out fines both for unfair dismissal and for runaway apprentices. Only householders with “half a ploughand at least in tillage” (Aughterson, 184) were permitted to assume apprentices. Similarly, only families with forty shillings of yearly income were permitted to apprentice their sons into more lucrative trades such as goldsmithing. Perhaps most importantly, the Statute of Artificers made training in a trade compulsory for working class citizens over the age of twelve. This was further regulated in the Poor Law Acts of 1601, which empowered church and justice officials to bind orphaned or poor children into cheap manual apprenticeships however they saw fit, often without the consent or
consultation of the child or family. As a result, a two-tier system of apprenticeship emerged; middle- and upper-class families chose where their children would be apprenticed, and were able to afford education in a wider range of professions. Regardless of social status, the Poor Acts also stipulated the educational requirements of apprenticeships. It is here that the overall educational aspects of apprenticeships were first put into law, as masters’ responsibilities “extended both to occupational instruction and moral supervision” (Aughterson, 197). As most European males at this time were associated with guilds (De Munk, 52), most European children were in turn educated through their apprenticeship.

This was also the case in colonial North America. Again, due to the lack of organized schools and the needs of settlers, “child labour and education were intertwined in early America” (Herndon, 4). Through an examination of eighteen thousand apprenticeship contracts from 16th to 19th century Canada and the United States, Herndon outlines a number of consistent factors including residence in the master’s household for four to nine years depending on the age of the beginning apprentice, provision of food, clothing, basic education in reading, writing, and ciphering, and moral or religious instruction. In contrast to Europe, there is extensive evidence of the apprenticeship of girls and young women in Colonial America. Though girls were generally taught “gender-appropriate” skills of housewifery, candlemaking, and needlework, their contracts also included expectations for reading and writing instruction (Herndon, 48).

Provisions for the orphaned or poor were similar to those legislated in England. For example, a Massachusetts law of 1642 stated that parents or guardians must educate their children “in some honest lawful calling, labour or imployment [sic],” or justices of the peace had the right to “place them with some masters” (Herndon, 123). Likewise, the 1646
Virginia grand assembly declared that magistrates could bind out children of “such parents who by reason of their poverty are disabled to maintaine [sic] and education them” (Herndon, 124). One method of determining a parent’s capacity for educating their children was formalized in a 1735 Boston requirement that children must know the alphabet by age six. If children were not proficiently literate through home learning, an official was able to remove the child and place them with a “master” (Youcha, 21). This further exemplifies the connection between general education and apprentice/master relationships.

Though dominant for centuries in the Western tradition, the apprenticeship model of education began to decline in the late nineteenth century for a number of reasons. As previously stated, public schooling in England became widespread and mandatory. Similar public institutions appeared in many Colonial states (Herndon, 34). The 1814 repealing of the Statute of Artificers also resulted in fewer apprenticeship contracts. With the onset of the industrial revolution, groups of children were increasingly used as cheap labour in factory conditions, where they did not necessarily receive education or complex training (Herndon, 44). Social attitudes towards children also changed during this period. The onset of the Enlightenment popularized the idea that “children had specific needs for education that were on some level different from and opposed to their ability to labor, especially under the age of about 10” (Herndon, 185). A number of laws made it possible for many colonial families to afford educating their children outside of working apprenticeships. In Virginia, for example, the removal of presumed primogeniture resulted in a more equal distribution of wealth among heirs. After the War of 1812, government provision of pensions to soldiers or their widows further eliminated the need for orphan support (Herndon, 191). With the 19th
century institutionalization of Western education, changing social ideals and increasing economic stability, the master/apprentice mode of learning soon became a rarity.

However, there has been resurgence in both research and experimentation in the apprenticeship model. Though not the primary form of education as in the past, apprenticeship and vocational programs for older students exist in many countries today. The National Apprenticeship Service of Great Britain reported almost 300,000 new apprenticeships in 2009, in fields varying from horticulture to administration and law (apprenticeships.org.uk). Most provinces in Canada also have apprenticeship regulation boards, which assist in the placement of students over sixteen with a qualified vocational expert (Young, 93). As research in education continues to focus on individualized, practical, and hands-on learning, the concept of apprenticeship is receiving increased attention. In her 1990 publication on the Collaborative-Apprenticeship Learning model, Bayer posits that all teachers should employ apprentice-like scaffolding in their classrooms. Though not always feasible with teacher-student ratios of 1:30, the model of apprenticeship is still considered both valuable and educationally sound.

While apprenticeships have experienced considerable decline in the last two hundred years, this model of learning clearly dominated Western education for thousands of years. Pre-1800, most boys and some girls would have received instruction from a master, parent or otherwise. As a result, children’s literature set in the past often includes or focuses on stories of apprenticeship learning. However, because there is little evidence of the quality of teaching or instruction within master/apprentice models (De Munk, 205), authors have considerable freedom in their depiction of these relationships.
1.2 Purpose and Questions for the Study

Through the lens of current best practice instructional theory, this study explored apprentice instruction in a sample of mentor-apprentice children’s literature. By considering five aspects of best practice considered essential in current educational research, this study closely examined the quality of instruction represented in two primary text mentor-apprentice novels: *The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch* by Joseph Delaney and *The Ranger’s Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan* by John Flanagan. The research questions for the study were: In a sample of mentor-apprentice young adult novels:

1. What is the teaching/learning relationship in the selected texts?
2. In relation to current educational research, in what ways do the master-teachers in the selected texts follow best practice in their instruction?
3. How does best-practice instruction contribute to student success in the selected texts?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Despite the abundance of school and learning narratives in children’s literature, there is a surprising lack of scholarship examining the nature of the teaching represented in these texts. In the few published studies of representations of educators and young learners, apprenticeship/mentor relationships are not mentioned or considered. The lack of literature on the subject of teachers in children’s books is even commented upon in the few studies that do exist. Neimi et al (2010) state that “few studies investigate the portrayal of teachers in children’s fiction” (59), while Triplett and Ash observe, “to our knowledge, there has been no examination of the relationships between students and teachers” (243). Existing
studies are more specific in scope and do not consider best practice in relation to fictional educators.

Hildebrand (1986), for example, focuses on the representations of school as a whole. She reflects on the tedium and restriction of schooling as depicted in texts such as Bridge to Terabithia and Jacob Have I Loved (83). In examining award-winning fiction from 1960-1980, Hildebrand gives many examples of the “essentially negative ethos” (84) surrounding education. She takes her study further by noting the lack of transference of current activity in educational circles to the models represented in children’s fiction (82). She summarizes the general representation of schools as “boring, irrelevant, unimaginative, rigid, petty, and dismal” (82).

Neimi et al (2010) focused their study on the portrayal of teachers in children’s literature. The focus, however, is on the image of the teacher rather than the quality or format of instruction. In part, this was due to their finding that teachers in children’s literature are often described, but “not described in the act of teaching” (69). Instead, the common image of a teacher is a white female who is conservative, modest, proper, and limited in both means and socio-economic class. The fictional purpose of these teachers is usually to be “unmasked” or discovered, or to be objects of heterosexual curiosity and desire for their male students (63). Indeed, the students’ focus of learning seems to be gathering information about the teacher instead of the subject matter itself. More concerning to the researchers was the frequent negative portrayal of teaching and educators. They found “in about one third of the cases, the teaching methods are portrayed as bad, wrong, or menacing” (64) and that students were often controlled through threats or fear. Despite these methods, or perhaps because of them, teachers were not generally portrayed as
powerful figures. Instead, they answer to either predominantly male principals, or to students themselves.

Neimi et al continue to question how readers will respond to this general portrayal. They question, “what messages authors and illustrators want children to receive about teachers” (61) and wonder if children’s books reflect what adults think school should be. But despite these important considerations, the study has no analysis of the actual teaching methods in these school stories, nor does it include wider portrayals of education such as the apprenticeship model.

In their 1995 study, Barone et al are also concerned by the perceived economic and social status of fictional teachers, as well as negative teacher images in literature. They examine a variety of picture books and novels for children and find that teachers fall into two categories: traditional and non-traditional, and the “traditional teachers are often perceived by their students as being less intelligent than the students themselves” (261). Though there are positive representations of teachers, these are usually non-traditional teachers, and as such, are viewed as unconventional and do not meet with wide community approval. Barone et al comment, “if we listen to messages within books and films, teachers who are sympathetic to students and create classrooms that support students in their learning are putting themselves into risky situations in school settings” (267). There are few examples of teachers who are well-liked by students and respected by school authorities or by their fictional societies in general. Not only are these negative stereotypes of teachers problematic as they “convey to the reader an image of teachers as villainous or insensitive” (262), it is also concerning that these characters can be classified so easily. As real-life education is a complex process involving interactions between people with their own
complex histories and motivations, the good/bad, traditional/non-traditional dichotomy around fictional teachers clearly does not represent real life. Though this study has little analysis of teaching methods used, the researchers do acknowledge that the changes, advances, and diversity found in modern teacher-education programs is not reflected in the teaching methods portrayed in children’s literature. In addition, the motivation behind this portrayal is questioned:

[W]hile it may be more entertaining to write and read about inept teachers who seem unaware of students as learners, the message is clear – schools are filled with teachers who make school an inauspicious place to be. Is this really the message we want children to glean as they read about children and classrooms in children’s books? (Barone et al, 268)

This question is further analyzed in the work of Kohl and Weitzman. Both authors consider the social implications of teacher depictions in children’s literature, in terms of gender as well as power. As teachers are dominant representations of power in the lives of their students, fictional teachers can also influence children’s perceptions of power within society. Kohl examines the negative power relationships presented in books such as the Babar series, noting that the adult ability to evaluate new messages or information with skepticism or sensitivity may not be present with children (Kohl, 18). Thus, children’s books, and not only those about education, teach children what is expected and acceptable. Kohl cautions authors, as well as librarians, parents, and educators, saying:

[W]hat is read in childhood not only leaves an impression behind but also influences the values, and shapes the dreams, of children. It can provide negative images and stereotypes and cut off hopes and limit aspirations. (Kohl, 41)
Weitzman et al voice similar observations. Though their research is centered more specifically on award-winning picture books, gender and power values remain a focus. The texts reveal clear messages about gender roles and expected behaviour from not only young boys and girls but also their adult counterparts. These messages directly affect the reader’s growing worldview and self-image. Weitzman comments on this effect, saying, “picture books play an important role in early sex-role socialization because they are a vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child” (1126). Conversely, by studying the messages in children’s literature, we can glean an indication of societal norms and values. This can be especially troubling when a gender role depicted in a story does not resonate with the feelings of gender identity in the child reader. The conflict then extends beyond a disassociation with a particular book, and can make a child feel judged or alienated by society as a whole. Though this study relates to the analysis of apprenticeship literature in that it emphasizes the importance of character representations in children’s literature, it does little to analyze teaching methods or the relationship between educator-mentor and student.

On the other hand, teacher-student relationships are the focus for a 2000 study by Triplett and Ash. The two pre-service teaching instructors analyze these relationships in books in order to reflect with their students on actual teacher relationships. Like Hildebrand and Barone et al, Triplett and Ash find that negatively portrayed teacher-student relationships abound. Teachers are classified as “relational” or “non-relational” with students, with relational teachers seeming more likeable or successful in the context of the story. Though the study does not examine actual teaching scenarios, it is relevant in its acknowledgement that the teacher-student relationship is paramount to the happiness and success of the learner. In addition, this study is unique in that it extends beyond the frame of
teacher as educator, including other adults from the school community as educator figures. The authors realized that “adult educators who serve in a variety of capacities were becoming a major source of information about school relationships” (243), including principals and counselors. This is a study of modern-day school stories, but the implication that classroom teachers are not the only examples of mentor-educators relates to the apprenticeship model as well.

The study that comes closest to an analysis of teaching methodology in children’s literature is that of Sandefur and Moore (2004). Through a close reading of 96 picture books, they characterized teacher representation according to five aspects: appearance, language, subject, approach, and effectiveness (6). They noticed through this analysis that teachers could be classified as either positive or negative:

A teacher fitting into the category of "positive teacher" was represented as being sensitive to children's emotional needs, supportive of meaningful learning, compassionate, warm, approachable, able to exercise classroom management skills without resorting to punitive measures or yelling, and was respectful and protective of children. A teacher would be classified as a "negative teacher" if he or she were represented as dictatorial, using harsh language, unable to manage classroom behavior, distant or removed, inattentive, unable to create a learning environment, allowing teasing or taunting among students, or unempathetic to students' diverse backgrounds. (6)

Through their five-point analysis and subsequent observations about teacher effectiveness, Sandefur and Moore begin to delve into the application of best practice research in children’s literature. Like other researchers, they are concerned by the
“propensity of images painting teachers in an unflattering light” and the “broader consequences on cultural perceptions of teachers and schooling” (2). They also notice that teachers in picture books are never shown as learners themselves, which they consider an important trait in an educator (7). Though this study begins to analyze teaching styles and portrayals in children’s literature, it is limited to picture books, and once again, to stories of modern education.

Despite an analysis of different components of teacher portrayal, there is an absence of apprentice texts in all of these studies about school and educators in children’s literature. Moreover, very little research has been published about the efficacy of the teaching performed in these stories. In many cases, educators are classified according to gender, appearance, or perceived likeability, instead of clearly defined standards of teaching excellence.

All of the above studies agree that the portrayal of teaching and the teacher-student relationship in children’s texts sends a message to readers. All express concern about the general negativity of this inherent message. Because children’s books are a “significant vehicle for social messages” (Niemi et al 59), and because they “mirror, consciously or not, cultural attitudes in the society that produced them” (Hildebrand, 82), depictions of teachers and learning cannot be dismissed as merely fictional plot devices. Sandefur summarizes by saying, “children are learning about teachers and school from the children’s books read to them” (8), and Triplett and Ash comment on this continued pattern, and societal mirroring, in middle years and young adult literature (248).

Despite the popularity and proliferation of modern school stories, little research exists on the depiction of teaching and learning in this literature. Studies including other
learning systems are notably absent. However, older models of educating, in particular the apprenticeship model, are common in picture books and novels alike. Children’s literature recognizes that widespread school systems are a relatively new concept in western civilization, while teaching and learning are not. This study, therefore, seeks to extend the current scant studies of educators in children’s books, and more specifically, to focus on the apprenticeship genre and the educating practices portrayed in these books.

1.4 Key Terms

**Apprentice** – For the purpose of this study, an apprentice is defined as a young person who is learning a trade, craft, or skill framework from a knowledgeable expert. This learning is often hands-on in nature and many years in duration. Apprenticeship rules and expectations of indentureship are often formally agreed upon.

**Master** – For the purpose of this study, a master is defined as the mentor or educator working directly with an apprentice. The master’s primary roles are teaching skills and passing on knowledge so that the apprentice can eventually assume the vocation of the master.

**Medieval** – Relating to the Middle Ages in European history. The beginning date of this time period is often debated. Some scholars consider the end of Roman rule in the 5th century AD to signify the beginning of the middle ages. Others pinpoint the battle of Hastings in 1066 AD as the beginning of the middle ages. In general, it is agreed that the years 1000-1300 AD form the “Central” or “High” middle ages. Consensus also places the end of the Middle Ages in the mid 15th century, with the discovery of the New World and the fall of Constantinople. For the purpose of this study, “medieval” refers to Europe during the High Middle Ages from 1000-1300 AD.
Best practice – Best practice is the combination of techniques, philosophies, and methodologies that have been proven through research and experience to deliver optimal

1.5 Chapter Overview

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the purpose, background and significance of this study. Following the introductory chapter, chapter two provides a literature review that covers the research and theory on best practice in education. The third chapter discusses the novel selection process including the evaluation criteria for that selection and the critical framework for examining the chosen novels. Chapters four and five are close readings of the two novels chosen for this study: Rangers Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan and The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The present chapter offers a review of theoretical perspectives and research findings related to current beliefs about best practice in education. Ideally, best practice teaching ensures student well-being, achievement, and success. Skinner (2010) explains, “to call something effective is to say that it produces the desired end or result…effective teaching means that expectations are achieved, or indeed exceeded” (5). While factors such as student background and ability must be considered, quality teaching has been proven to be a vital component in academic success: “the teacher has proven time and again to be the most influential school-related force in student achievement” (Stronge, x). Given the wide range of educational settings, researchers understandably have a wide variety of perspectives on best practice; however, general themes emerge in all best practice research. Effective teachers have a distinct set of personal qualities, are able to navigate curriculum meaningfully, provide a range of active learning experiences for students, and are adept at all types of assessment. Each of these four aspects of best practice teaching is examined in the following sections.

2.1 The Effective Teacher as an Individual

This section explores the research on what personal qualities appear to support best practice in teaching. Best practice in teaching concerns not only actions but also attitudes and personal priorities. In order to be an effective teacher, a person must demonstrate a variety of qualities. These qualities include having a constructive attitude towards learning and students, acting as a positive personal and professional example, and demonstrating knowledge of both curriculum and pedagogy.
Teachers who appear enthusiastic, positive, and confident set the tone for their students and the learning environment. Students are attuned to the mood and temperament of their teachers, meaning, “a teacher’s happiness can affect the classroom climate and therefore affect students” (Stronge, 22). Obviously, greeting a student with a smile or a frown will have an effect on student perception. However, the importance of teacher disposition extends beyond a good or foul mood: research shows that when teachers model curiosity and enthusiasm towards learning, these attitudes are passed on to students and increases their success (McInerney & Leim, 187). Because “learner behaviour in the classroom depends on the teacher’s own behaviour” (Skinner, 12), it is important for teachers to consider and regulate the attitudes they present to students. Researchers agree that effective educators interact with students in a friendly and personable manner, show joy for what they are teaching, have a good sense of humour, and show confidence and enthusiasm (Stronge, 27, Skinner, 53, Wiseman & Hunt, 143, Smith & Strahan, 365). Smith & Strahan (2004) cite “confidence” as one of the six Central Tendencies of effective teachers (365), while Wiseman & Hunt choose “modeling and enthusiasm” as one of three paramount teacher characteristics (15). Ideally, a teacher’s confidence and enthusiasm should extend beyond curricular content and into his or her own professional capability. Wiseman & Hunt explain, “teachers who hold the belief that they and their schools can have a positive effect on their students and their learning have high teacher efficacy… [and] increased student achievement” (143). By presenting a sunny attitude towards content, learning, and their own abilities, effective teachers instill these attitudes into their students and create positive learning environments.
Teachers should also set a positive example for students through their actions. Because of the time children and youth spend with their teachers during their formative years, as well as their role as mentors and educators; teachers are in a position to have great influence on the morals and values of their students. Stronge (2007) asserts that the best practice teacher emphasizes fairness (25), “shows respect to all students” (110), and “admits mistakes and corrects them immediately” (116). Because of their professional role, Stronge further advises teachers to maintain thoroughly professional dress and language (110, 116). Skinner (2010) advocates for teachers as social justice promoters, “interrupting the cycles of oppression, challenging them and developing effective strategies to counter injustice in the schooling process” (15). The effective teacher should encourage a worldview that promotes fairness and equality, and this should translate into their own classroom actions. This includes avoiding favouritism, intervening in situations of violence or bullying, and attending to students’ self esteem by “never embarrass[ing] students for their mistakes” (Wiseman & Hunt, 17). Not only do these actions inspire trust and faith in the teacher, they also contribute to the moral and social education of students.

By setting a positive example, teachers can lay the foundation for an effective professional relationship with their students. An effective teacher-student relationship directly affects student well-being, engagement, and success (Klem & Connell, 2004). Research shows that “positive relationships between teachers and students are associated with higher test scores, improved engagement, and motivation” (TSR 18). Frymier & Houser (2000) state, “the relationship between teachers and students is a major factor in the affective learning that occurs in the classroom” (208). On the other hand, a lack of
connection to a caring adult in school is often associated with lack of student motivation, failure, and dropping out of school (TSR 17). Muller, Katz, and Dance (1999) summarize:

[S]tudents… are highly attuned to teachers’ behaviour toward them. They are constantly watching teachers for evidence of encouragement and recognition. If students sense the presence of high expectations and caring, they glimpse hints of an opening into the path of academic success. Conversely, if absent, the students feel that the opening is blocked and they assess the obstacles as insurmountable. Then they disengage from the learning process at school. (319)

Best practice demands that educators form caring, empathetic relationships with their students in order to maximize students’ well-being and success. Establishing and maintaining these relationships, though time consuming and not directly involved with curriculum, should be a priority for effective teachers. At its most basic, this means teachers should strive to get to know their students as individuals, “in terms of their abilities, achievement, learning styles, and needs” (Stronge, 71). In addition, an effective teacher is aware of students’ interests, family life, and social culture outside of school. Student engagement and effort increases when a teacher is perceived as caring. A caring teacher “exhibits active listening” (Stronge, 110) by attending to students’ questions and concerns, addresses students by name (Stronge, 116 & Frymier & Houser, 209), and “asks students about themselves” (Frymier & Houser, 209). Caring can be further demonstrated by practicing patience, tact, trust, gentleness, understanding, and encouragement. Caring teachers empathize with and invest in their students, and students respond positively in turn (Wiseman & Hunt, 15). Relationship-building actions such as
“emphasizing praise” and “constant dialogue and verbal interaction” enhance student self-worth and yield considerable academic gains (McInerney & Liem, 276). The effective teacher is genuinely interested in students as people, and genuinely concerned with students’ feelings and opinions. While it is important for teachers to maintain some professional distance about their own personal lives (Aultman et al, 2009), it is essential for teachers to demonstrate kindness and support to promote student self-esteem and success.

Educators can further enhance student self-esteem and achievement by ensuring that they approach their role with a “students first” philosophy. Best practice research shows that students are most successful when teachers act as a “guide on the side” as opposed to a “sage on the stage” (McInerney & Liem, 40). Best practice teachers see themselves as facilitators of learning instead of disseminators of information. Smith (2004) notes that the three expert teachers in her study all “talk about their classroom as a community of learners” and “demonstrate a student-centered approach to instruction” (365). Instead of presenting information, these teachers organize the classroom and lessons so that students are able to explore ideas and discover knowledge. Wiseman & Hunt (2008) agree, saying an “effective teacher shapes specific organization schemes to assist students in ordering and arranging information” (145). This aligns with the constructivist notions that students should be personalizing learning and creating meaning using their own schemas. Thus, the process of student learning is emphasized, rather than a final product. Through focus on student understanding and improvement, a good teacher shows students “how to see learning as ongoing – rather than a completion of simple tasks” (Parsons & Harding, 5). This aspect of best practice is further discussed in
the third section of this chapter, which focuses on assessment. Effective teachers serve as mentors who support students and show them how to learn and think, so that students are eventually able to complete tasks on their own. Interestingly, Skinner (2010) compares the ideal teacher-student construct to an apprenticeship, saying that in best practice, “the teacher models, coaches, and gradually withdraws support as the apprentices develop competence” (63). This “gradual release of responsibility” is a key feature of effective instruction.

Researchers agree that student-centered instruction must be coupled with clear and ambitious expectations. When a teacher has higher expectations of his or her students and works diligently to help them attain these goals, students are more successful. Wiseman explains, “teacher expectations tend to be self-fulfilling; the expression of low expectations by differential treatment can inadvertently lead children to believe less in their abilities and perform more poorly” (15). In order to encourage and enable success in students, “teachers are expected to have high expectations of learners” (Skinner, 87). Stronge adds that effective teachers should also have “high expectations for student behaviour” (45), and discusses the correlation between high expectations and student improvement and growth. Thus, an effective teacher needs to make students the center of learning activities, and ensure that these learning activities challenge and promote growth. The nature of effective learning activities is addressed in more detail in the next two sections of this paper.

Another key aspect of best practice teaching is reflection on one’s own learning and efficacy. As research and demographics change and evolve, expert teachers must ensure they are constantly educating themselves about best practice and current
resources. Teachers pursuing best practice “routinely reflect on experiences, experiment…and refine their knowledge base” (McInerney & Liem, 45). Even if a teacher’s program appears to be successful, they should still “remain curious about and receptive to change” (Munro, 6). Skinner (2010) encourages teachers to avoid “pigeon-holing [themselves] as a certain kind of teacher and not working to acquire the skills and qualities to teach other subjects, groups, and in different contexts (7). Teachers often compel their students to go beyond their comfort zones and try new experiences; the effective teacher should model this in their own practice as well. Research indicates that effective teachers are open to the same self-critique and self-evaluation they expect of their students (Stronge, 30). Excellent teachers are open to new ideas and approaches, and can “serve as powerful examples of life-long learners as they find ways to develop professionally” (Stronge, 30). Through eagerness about professional development and conversations with students about their own learning, teachers model effective learning to their students (Stronge, 29, Skinner, 150). Teachers should be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and seek ways in which to better their practice. As Munro (2005) summarizes, “willingness to confront the efficacy of one’s paradigms of teaching and learning…is the essence of professional excellence” (6).

Participation in the professional community is a key aspect of teacher learning and development. Teachers who work cooperatively with their colleagues and are active in contributing to professional development are more effective in their classroom practice. Smith & Strahan (2004) cite leadership and service as one of the six central tendencies of effective teachers (365), and further explain, “what is generally accepted as best practice suggests that expert teachers are involved in making their profession better”
Other aspects of effective participation include “work[ing] collaboratively with other staff members”, “volunteer[ing] to lead teams and be mentors to new teachers” (Stronge, 29), and “participat[ing] in collegial activities” (Stronge, 110). Wenglinsky (2002) found teacher participation in professional development to be one of the foremost indicators of student success (19). Making professional contribution a priority serves to ensure constant learning and improvement for students as well as all members of the teaching community.

Teacher knowledge is a further indicator and predictor of student success. Teachers should be highly educated in a general sense, and have specific expertise in the subject(s) they are teaching, because “strong content knowledge has consistently been identified as an essential element by those who study effective teaching” (Stronge, 10). Research indicates students will test at a higher level if they are taught by teachers who score high on standardized tests (Wenglinsky, 4). In addition, teachers who majored in their subject area produce more proficient students (Wenglinsky, 4). Because “effective teachers… have a deep knowledge of the subjects they teach” (Wiseman & Hunt, 12), teachers should ensure that they are highly educated in their content areas and that they continue to stay up to date in their field. General verbal ability also contributes to effective teaching. Research shows a “strong positive correlation between language clarity and student achievement” (Wiseman & Hunt, 145). This includes teachers who are adept at presenting with connected discourse, using precise vocabulary and linguistic transitions, and emphasizing important points. Stronge (2007) summarizes, “students taught by teachers with greater verbal ability learn more than those taught by teachers with lower verbal ability” (4).
There is a wide body of research concerning the personal qualities of an excellent teacher. Experts agree that effective teachers show confidence and enthusiasm, while working to create caring, empathetic relationships with each of their students. Best practice research indicates that teachers, as professionals, should be highly self-aware and should seek continual improvement, education, and leadership opportunities. Students will be most successful when teachers are proficient in their subject area and have developed strong verbal communication skills. Each of these qualities has been isolated in successful teachers, and has been proven to be associated with student improvement and success.

2.2 Curriculum

When defining best practice in teaching, it is imperative to consider what content should be taught. Even the most dedicated and educated teacher needs clear subject matter in order to effectively organize information and explore it with their students. For this reason, almost every authoritative body in education has created a standard curriculum for their country, state, province, or school system. The purpose of this curriculum is “to outline the knowledge that would be important for each content area” (Kelting-Gibson, 42). However, curriculum ideas vary based on location, research, and educational theory. James & Pollard (2011) state that “there has always been a debate about what a whole curriculum should consist of” (283), but a number of overarching tenets are common in current curricular best practice research.

It can be difficult to hold teachers accountable for curriculum, as sources and individuals above the classroom instructor usually make decisions about standards, scope, and learning outcomes. As a result, teachers often feel a lack of ownership towards
curriculum (Weiss & Pasley, 24). Best practice in this area is therefore dependent on school authorities and policy-makers as well. Educational leaders and writers of curriculum need to ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills their students are expected to have, and teachers are in turn responsible for familiarizing themselves with these expectations (Popham, 20). Ideally, learning objectives should consider processes and mindsets as well as facts and knowledge. This encourages a focus on deeper learning in the curriculum with less emphasis on hundreds of information items. The state of Hawaii has embraced this outlook in recent years, changing its expectations to “reduce the number of content standards to a smaller, more intellectually manageable number of curricular targets” (Popham, 20). British Columbia is also revising its Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each subject, aiming to pare down outcomes but allow for more in-depth, thematic approaches from individual classroom teachers.

Current best practice research supports a transition from knowledge-based outcomes to processes and higher-level thinking skills. Parsons & Harding (2011) challenge educators to “focus on process and pedagogy instead of content”(8), prioritizing demonstrations of learning rather than demonstrations of achievement. Wenglinsky (2002) also stresses the importance of higher order thinking skills – having students either use knowledge to solve problems, or to provide simulations during instruction to show examples. “Higher-level thinking” in this context means that teachers need to emphasize depth of knowledge, connectedness to the world, and attitudes of questioning and curiosity towards learning. In other words, students need to be taught not only specific facts, but also more importantly, how to think and learn. In effective
curriculum implementation, “knowing how” supersedes “knowing that”. James & Pollard summarize this departure from fact-based curriculum in their 2011 study:

>Pedagogy should engage learners with the big ideas, key processes, modes of discourse, ways of thinking and practicing, attitudes and relationships, which are the most valued… in particular contexts. They need to understand what constitutes quality, standards, and expertise in different settings. (284)

In addition, changing societal needs have impacted the range of what an effective teacher teaches. While critical thinking skills have always been educationally valuable, they are particularly important in an age where technology makes access to facts quick and simple. Best practice in teaching now includes the “use [of] technology for learning and communication” (McInerney & Liem, 45). As the nature of information and information exchange evolves, teachers must integrate technology skills and strategies into the curriculum. An effective teacher stays abreast of advances in technology and encourages his or her students to utilize and evaluate emerging resources.

Though citizenship has always been an important aspect of the public school curriculum, education in social justice issues is a growing necessity in best practice teaching. Teachers need to ensure that they approach curricular topics with multiculturalism, gender equity, acceptance, and tolerance in mind. In BC, the creation of a Social Justice 12 elective course underscores the continuing and evolving priority of citizenship education. James & Pollard (2011) support this priority, stating:

>Learning should aim to help individuals and groups to develop the intellectual, personal, and social resources that will enable them to participate as active citizens, contribute to economic development and flourish as individuals in a
diverse and changing society. This means adopting a broad conception of worthwhile learning outcomes and taking seriously issues of equity and social justice for all. (283)

Teachers must also ensure that the content of their lessons is meaningful and concrete. Students should spend the majority of their learning time with outcomes that will apply later in life or help them accomplish a real task. This aligns with constructivist ideas of “authenticity and relevance” – that learning a fact or skill should relate to successful participation in the world and/or a culture (McInerney & Liem, 39). Effective educators should emphasize learning standards that are important for adult living and success, and “choose practical objectives” when designing lessons (Kelting-Gibson, 42). When a student sees the direct relationship between their learning and their future abilities, they are more likely to take ownership of their progress. Wiggins (1997) argues, “to ensure that learning is more successful and better focused, curricula must be built upon worthy and authentic tasks that provide a rationale for content, skills, and modes of instruction” (56). Munro (2005) takes this concept further, encouraging educators to conduct a needs analysis in order to understand what a society expects of its citizens or what an employer expects in a future worker, and then ensure that their teaching content agrees with these needs (3). Meaningful and relevant learning outcomes increase student engagement and create graduates who are confident and able in real-world tasks.

When designing or implementing curriculum, students must be included in a variety of ways. The pre-teaching process of assessing students’ knowledge and backgrounds is vital when educators are determining what curriculum or outcomes should be taught. While the features and importance of this process is addressed in a later
section of this paper with a focus on assessment, it is relevant to discuss the practice in relation to curriculum as well. A curriculum is only useful if it is accessible to students at their stage of knowledge and development. As a teacher selects learning outcomes, they must both “recognize the importance of prior experience and learning” and “take account of the personal and cultural experiences of different groups of learners” (James & Pollard, 284). Lessons should always be designed keeping students’ abilities in mind, integrating what they already know and challenging them to learn more (Weiss & Pasley, 25). In addition, curriculum must be adapted depending on the learning styles, backgrounds, and possible knowledge gaps of a particular group of students. In other words, it is not a “one size fits all” package.

Finally, best practice research encourages inclusion of students in curricular choices: because “a chief goal of teaching and learning should be the promotion of learners’ independence and autonomy” (James & Pollard, 298), students should be involved in aspects of curricular planning instead of mere recipients of a lesson. With teacher help and scaffolding, students should be able to identify what they already know and explain what they are able, or excited, to learn next. Kelting-Gibson (2013) states, “the child should have considerable input in the planning of the curriculum along with the teacher” (43) as this will increase relevance and engagement, resulting in learning gains. Research advocates for teacher-supported learner autonomy and “self-determination of learning concepts or strategies” (McInerney & Liem, 44). Facilitating student choice and input in matters of curriculum and learning outcomes can help promote student interest and readiness, two key features of constructivist learning theory.
It is impossible to create or advocate for one “best practice curriculum” that all educators should follow. Curricular research stresses the need for teachers to tailor lessons and outcomes to students’ abilities, backgrounds, and interests, as well as the technological or social equity demands of the times. General considerations for best practice curricular implementation should include a focus on processes and skills, higher-level thinking, and authentic and meaningful knowledge. By emphasizing outcomes with these considerations in mind, educators can ensure a well-rounded curricular scope.

2.3 Instructional Strategies

While curricular choices, personal demeanor, aptitude, and education are important aspects of best practice teaching, they must be combined with effective lesson implementation in order to ensure student success. The nature of learning activities is arguably the most important consideration of best practice teaching. Teachers need to consider planning and organization, lesson pacing and goals, and discipline strategies well before beginning instruction. They also need to pay close attention to questioning methods, variety of learning experiences, and maximum student engagement. Teachers often need to be flexible in their educational strategies, as children require differentiation and variety for optimal learning.

Organization is a vital facet of teaching. Pre-planning should be thorough and thoughtful as teachers decide how to best introduce concepts. This can range from setting expectations and routines at the beginning of the instructional period to individual lessons or activities: Wenglinsky (2002) states, “decisions that teachers make about classroom practices can either greatly facilitate student learning or serve as an obstacle to it” (6). Student participation and engagement in learning should be the primary focus, and
teachers need to design their classrooms or instructional areas with this in mind. Physical arrangements and daily schedules both need to be considered, as effective teachers “use time and space in flexible and meaningful ways” (McInerney & Liem, 44). Quality of lesson delivery is dependent on effective planning, considering students’ strengths and needs. In addition to ensuring that planned activities match student ability, teachers need to ensure they are introducing topics in a manner that presents a mental framework into which new concepts can be integrated (Wiseman & Hunt, 15). Best practice demands that student learning time is maximized, meaning that teachers must “have their materials ready when it is time to begin their lessons, start on time, have established learning routines, and engage their students throughout the instructional period” (Wiseman & Hunt, 144). Planning and organization is often cited by experts as one of the key areas of best practice teaching (Armstrong, Henson, & Savage, 1997, Wenglinsky 2002).

Planning also includes careful consideration of pacing and lesson goals. This paper has already addressed the importance of teachers having high expectations of their students. In terms of lesson implementation, this translates into challenging tasks and brisk scheduling. In addition, teachers must consider that children learn differently than adults, and therefore require differently paced and organized learning experiences. Though research shows that “there is a greater value in the teacher establishing a quicker paced as compared to a slower paced delivery of instruction” (Wiseman & Hunt, 92), best practice teachers also need to know when to slow down and allow students to explore in depth. Zemelmen et al (2005) explain, “students don’t get enough time to try out, practice, and apply what teachers are talking about” (261). Effective teachers are able to balance their pacing to ensure complexity as well as time for careful thought. This
ensures “a learning environment that simultaneously supports and challenges students” (Weiss & Pasley, 27). Likewise, lesson goals should be carefully considered to ensure they are both ambitious and reasonable. Wiseman & Hunt (2008) explain this dichotomy:

[Goals that are moderately difficult, specific, and likely to be reached in the near future enhance motivation and persistence…. When goals are too complex, vague, and/or confusing, too challenging, or seem to have no importance, students are more likely not to pursue them. (73)]

In their 1997 study, Armstrong et al also advocate for high but realistic goals as well as “brisk lesson pace, requiring public and overt student participation” (quoted in Wiseman & Hunt, 131). An effective teacher plans lesson goals and pacing carefully, but is also prepared to adapt as the lesson evolves.

Discipline and classroom management are further aspects of instruction that can be planned in advance but also require strong reactionary and responding skills. As best practice expects that student learning time be maximized, teachers should not be spending the bulk of their time on management issues. In an ideal classroom, students are aware of behaviour expectations and teachers have facilitated a respectful classroom community with minimal disruptions: if teachers “create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation” (Wiseman & Hunt, 7), student behaviour issues will be reduced. Ideally, students are involved in setting out classroom rules and regulations early on in the year or term, and therefore take more ownership of classroom expectations. Effective teachers maintain these expectations by responding quickly and consistently to issues and treating all students
with dignity and respect. An effective teacher is also pre-emptive in behaviour management by having a “heightened awareness of all actions and activities in the classroom” (Stronge, 42), and by “reinforc[ing] and reiterat[ing] expectations for positive behaviour” (Stronge, 111). Management issues can arise in an educational setting, even with the most skillful and capable teachers. Therefore, it is important to establish clear expectations, stress student responsibility and accountability, and promptly, firmly, and respectfully handle disciplinary situations.

Best practice research includes a number of ideas about grouping students for instruction. It is generally agreed that, “lower class sizes lead to better learning environments” (McInerney & Liem, 57), and some experts believe “the ideal teaching and learning process is a one-to-one discussion” (Luarillard, 1993 48). However, interaction between pupils can also lead to valuable learning moments. Skinner (2010) advocates for the “crucial role of social interaction and the value, for example, of peer tutoring, peer assessment, and collaborative group work” (86). Joyce & Weil (1996) agree that co-operation is highly conducive to mutual learning, as “interacting with one another produces cognitive as well as social complexity, creating more intellectual activity that increases learning when contrasted with solitary study” (67). Though individualized attention from a teacher is beneficial to students, especially when the student is struggling, most researchers recommend that learning activities be conducted in small peer groupings. Joyce & Weil (1996) further explain: “in classrooms organized so that students work in pairs and larger groups, tutor each other, and share rewards, there is greater mastery of material than with the common individual-study-cum-recitation pattern” (68).
Small pupil groupings are especially suitable when students are engaged in exploration and discovery, which is largely agreed upon as the ideal form of learning. Best practice experts indicate that lessons should be focused around active participation, where “learners are directly involved in actions that support cognition” (McInerney & Liem, 39). When students are completing tasks and arriving at conclusions, they personalize new information and retain it on a deeper level. Joyce & Weil (1996) argue, “each person must construct his or her own knowledge, which cannot be absorbed ready-made from adults” (284). Teachers who create learning experiences for their students, instead of directly telling them answers or facts, allow students to learn not only information but also the process of learning. Further, students report much more enjoyment in learning when they are personally involved, with “children from 14-19 most prefer[ring] sustained learning through action and experience” (Skinner, 60). This action and experience can range from spontaneous play to carefully scaffolded science experiments, as long as students are “hands-on” in their learning. Students’ preference is not the only reason best practice educators use this type of learning: “teachers who use hands-on learning strategies have students who out perform their peers” (Stronge, 69). On a larger level, research finds that “schools in which students engage in hands on learning score higher on...assessment[s]” (Wenglinsky, 19). Effective teachers, therefore, plan for lessons and learning experiences that largely emphasize activity, exploration, adventure, and discovery.

Experiential learning forms the bulk of quality teaching, however, experts also stress the need for variety in all educational programming. Because students learn differently, it is important to consider multiple perspectives and multiple intelligences
when planning activities. Teachers should also consider different levels of thinking during lessons. Use of cognitive theories such as Blooms Taxonomy can help teachers “structure learning activities to facilitate different levels of thinking” (McInerney, 28). Skinner (2010) argues that instructional variety is consistently associated with high pupil attainment (21), while Wiseman & Hunt (2008) stress the importance of using different teaching strategies and resources in order to engage students. Because all learners are individuals, and because different concepts require different educational approaches, “effective teachers recognize that no single instructional strategy can be used in all situations” (Strong, 69).

Skinner addresses the need for variety with a four-mode construct of best practice teaching. These modes can be summarized as: direct teaching, teaching through dialogue and discussion, teaching through action and experience, and teaching through inquiry. The last two modes are consistent with research about the efficacy of hands-on learning experiences. While many teachers are adept at one or two of these styles, “the effective teacher is someone who has a mastery of each mode” (Skinner, 23). Mastery includes adapting the role of the teacher to facilitate each instructional mode. In direct teaching, the educator is seen as the expert, “presenting, explaining, demonstrating, modeling, controlling, maintaining strong direction” (Skinner, 36). This mode of teaching can be especially effective when a specific set of facts must be clarified in a timely manner, or when safety instructions must be given. In teaching through dialogue and discussion, “the teacher’s role is to model discussion and dialogue skills, and to conduct or at least facilitate the flow of conversation” (Skinner, 54). Young children especially need guidance to participate effectively and ask one another questions. Students often seek to
come up with the right answer or engage solely with their teacher, and teachers in this mode need to facilitate student-to-student discussion and ongoing conversation. In action and experience, “the teacher’s role is to involve learners fully in planning and reflecting, not to direct or push them through the activity” (Skinner, 64). Students have much more autonomy in this mode, which for some can be overwhelming. Teachers need to encourage students to sustain their actions and reflect upon their learning. Finally, inquiry teaching requires not an instructor but an advisor who can help choose strategies and resources. The teacher’s role in this case is to “support and challenge… while enabling learners to retain ownership of the inquiry” (Skinner, 77). This inquiry more of teaching and learning is widely accepted as best practice in current research. Joyce & Weil (1996) explain that inquiry learning invites students into the community of scholars and truly makes them architects of their own knowledge (187). Teachers should present students with a genuine problem and invite them to consider ways to overcome that problem. In this manner, students also understand the limitations of knowledge, as well as the value of questioning, commitment, trying different strategies, and the learning process. Hands-on learning, as practiced in the third and fourth modes, is proven to deliver impressive results. Skinner (2010) reminds us, however, “the effective teacher needs to deploy all four modes in a balanced way to meet the range of contexts, subjects, and teaching aims” (24).

Regardless of the teaching method utilized, research shows that teachers questioning methods are of paramount importance. Often, teachers believe they are engaging students in active learning because they are constantly asking questions and eliciting student answers. Experts indicate that best practice questioning goes beyond
basic, low level repetition or fact recall. For active student engagement, “traditional low-level questioning…is not recommended (Skinner, 44). Instead, teachers need to ask more open-ended questions that facilitate ongoing communication, creating “deeper understanding, wiser judgment, greater awareness of significant factors and better discussion skills” (Skinner, 50). Higher-level questioning contributes to greater student understanding and success (Strong, 81, Weiss & Pasley, 27). Weiss & Pasley (2004) describe best practice questioning as “the kind that monitors students’ understanding of new ideas and encourages students to think more deeply” (25). Wiseman & Hunt (2008) further explain, “research continues to reinforce the relationship between the quality of a teacher’s questioning skills and student achievement” (151). Wiseman & Hunt assert that low level questioning can also be effective, but only when paired with astute questioning skills: “both high-and low-cognitive questions correlate positively with student achievement. Frequency, equitable distribution, prompting, and wait time are considered to be characteristics of effective questioning strategies” (151). In other words, teachers need to ask appropriate questions but also follow up with 3-5 seconds of wait time and prompting clues when faced with silence or incorrect answers. Teachers also need to carefully consider their response to wrong answers, so that students are not discouraged or embarrassed when sharing their ideas. Other experts advocate for increased time for students to ask questions. Ideally, teachers should “make deliberate room for pupil questions by stopping asking questions themselves and encouraging pupil questions” (Skinner, 72). Regardless of the type of questioning used, it is vital that the classroom culture encourages curiosity and reflective thinking through asking and answering questions.
Teachers must carefully consider how they bring together their knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to implement effective learning activities. Effective educators have a firm grasp of planning and organization, both pre-emptive and spontaneous. They incorporate brisk pacing and high expectations, reasonable and consistent discipline, and student-centered learning activities. In addition, they are able to effectively convey information, teach skills, and ask questions using a variety of strategies and approaches. Each of these implementation skills are necessary to ensure student achievement and success.

2.4 Assessment

Effective instruction requires continuous and variegated assessment practices. Though the term “assessment” brings to mind formal, cumulative, ‘end of unit’ written tests, this has become an old-fashioned and outdated viewpoint: current assessment practices are much more broad and flexible. Instructional assessment in this examination of best practice includes “all the formal and informal ways teachers examine student learning and performance. Methods and tools may include oral questioning, quizzes, tests… observations of performance, and any other product or sample of behaviour” (Volante, 135). The purpose and methods of assessment in best practice teaching should demonstrate a number of key elements, each of which will be addressed in this section. Effective assessment should: avoid singular high-stakes testing, be aligned with clear standards or expectations, involve authentic, fair, and meaningful tasks, communicate constructive feedback, feature significant student involvement, and inform future teaching and learning.
All Canadian provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, mandate a formal province-wide standardized test during the K-12 years. Likewise, each of the United States administers a mandatory assessment in public schools in order to receive federal funding and comply with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. However, research indicates that high-stakes testing is not successful in supporting positive learning attitudes (Black et al 2004, Clark 2008, Chappuis & Stiggins 2002, Shepard 2000). Even school boards that require these cumulative, one size fits all tests (that are not created by the individual teachers of a classroom) acknowledge their limited capacity for furthering learning. In a guidebook for assessment, the Alberta Education branch states “when using external testing methods and using results from such assessments, teachers should be sure to balance these with information gained from other classroom assessment methods” (Alberta, 28). High-stakes external testing does not often accommodate for multiple intelligences or learning disabilities, and in addition, encourages comparison and competition between students of varying abilities. As a result, teachers and students end up focusing on knowledge and rote memorization skills instead of more educationally valuable higher-level thinking skills (Clark 2008). Because “high stakes external tests always dominate teaching and assessment” (Black et al 2004), less time and energy is left to be devoted to more relevant and flexible assessment options.

In addition to influencing the climate of learning in the classroom, singular cumulative assessments cause anxiety in students. Students are generally intimidated and pressured by high-stakes testing, and this can negatively affect their result, which in turn damages their view of themselves as a productive and capable learner. Clark comments on this cycle in his 2008 study: “high stakes testing creates disaffected students, and disaffected
students don’t achieve their full potential” (8). Though often required by governing bodies in education, singular summative assessments are not ideal for positive teaching and learning.

This does not mean that best practice teaching should avoid set standards and expectations; in fact, the opposite is true. Effective assessment, and teaching, should be clearly aligned with benchmarks or defined learning outcomes. However, these objectives or standards should be clearly stated and then assessed in a variety of ways. Best practice instruction begins with a clear goal in mind. Teachers, and students, should be aware of the purpose of both lessons and assessments. Aligning assessment with a specific learning outcome allows for uniformity as well as transparency in expectation (Volante, 137). Students will be more motivated when they understand what they are meant to be learning, and what a successful demonstration of this learning will look like. Alberta Education states, “students are motivated to learn when the instruction they receive and the assessments and evaluations they complete are clearly aligned to the learning outcomes and provide information that can be used to design follow-up learning opportunities” (20). The standards being assessed, as well as the criteria for an excellent product, should be transparent to students to facilitate accessibility of success. Researchers agree that standards should be clear and that teachers should carefully construct assessment tools that match learning outcomes (Shepard 2000, Center 2006, Chappuis et al 2009). For example, students should be aware of whether they are being assessed for their knowledge of facts or their skills or abilities. While assessment of knowledge could be effectively assessed using traditional pen and paper methods, skills or abilities could be evaluated more suitably through student demonstrations or tangible
production. Individual classroom teachers should have the autonomy as well as the professional aptitude to determine how students should best demonstrate each learning outcome. Finally, standards and expectations must be set thoughtfully. Students have been shown to excel when given a challenge, as long as this is accompanied by encouragement and instilled confidence. Therefore, effective teachers set standards that are high enough to motivate and empower students, without being so high they are unrealistic, causing student frustration.

Effective teachers must also carefully consider assessment tasks and methods. As stated previously, students must be aware of the purpose of the assessment, and teachers must ensure the assessment tool matches the taught learning outcomes. Effective assessment should measure cognitive skills and problem solving abilities as well as rote facts (Alberta, 21, Shepard 2000, 7). Assessment tasks are effective when they are relevant to students’ lives outside the school walls (McInerney & Liem, 35). When logistically possible, all assessment should be authentic and realistic in nature, so that students are able to recognize the importance of a skill or ability and show their knowledge in a meaningful manner. Though teachers often need to provide help or scaffolding, best practice in assessment means “the child completes the real task” (Shepard 2005, 66). By including concrete and authentic assessment tools, teachers ensure that students understand why their knowledge is necessary as well as how and when to apply it to a given situation. Many studies on effective assessment stress the importance of ‘transfer’: students should be able to show they can use learned information in a variety of contexts, and in new situations (Shepard 2000, 10, McInerney & Liem, 39). In addition, assessment methods must be appropriately varied, as learning
outcomes and learners are both diverse. Alberta Education acknowledges this need for assessment range, stating, “no single student assessment method, by itself, is likely to accurately measure learning” (21). In order to attain a clear and accurate understanding of students’ abilities, teachers need to consider differences in written output abilities, language familiarity, multiple intelligences, and daily fluctuations in basic elements such as sleep and nutrition. Best practice in assessment requires “educators to use varied, multi-modality instructional and assessment tools in their classrooms” (Volante, 139). This also includes providing students with adequate time and resources during assessment, a broad range of difficulty levels, and transparent scoring guides. When assessment tasks are meaningful and varied, students are able to give a complete demonstration of their knowledge and skills.

However, “the use of multiple measures does not, by itself, translate into high-quality evidence” (Chappuis et al 15). Once teachers collect assessment data, it is critical to continue the assessment cycle through the provision of effective feedback. While traditional testing methods end with a student receiving a grade or numerical ranking, research indicates that this does little to enhance learning (Black et al 2004, Chappuis et al 2009, Shepard 2000, Wiggins 2012). Over the last fifteen years, educational research has shown that ongoing, continuous assessment and feedback, or “assessment for learning,” is the most effective approach for student improvement and success. In assessment for learning, the feedback process is key. Most traditional responses to students work, including advice, comments after the fact, and praise or criticism, are not framed as effective feedback. Best practice research emphasizes that feedback should be “goal-referenced, tangible and transparent, actionable, user friendly, timely, ongoing, and
consistent” (Wiggins, 15). Though these requirements may be daunting to many teachers, the key element to effective feedback is providing actionable information, or a clear indication of strengths, weaknesses, and items for further focus. As Shepard states in her 2005 study, “feedback is most effective when it helps the student move forward” (69). With effective feedback, teachers can increase their students’ motivation and confidence by emphasizing progress instead of failure. Inconsequential errors do not need to be addressed with every assessment task. If students are incorrect about a key point, feedback should indicate why a response is right or wrong and explain steps toward improvement (Chappuis & Stiggins, 42, Wiggins 14, Shepard 2000, 10). In addition, productive feedback should target individual learning objectives, as “useful comments focus specifically on improving only one area at a time” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 40). This extensive cycle of assessment and feedback requires hard work and careful observation, but provides students with valuable and specific information, resulting in optimal learning and growth.

This learning is compounded further when students are actively involved in the assessment process. By monitoring their own progress, students take responsibility for their own understanding and improvement. Researchers agree that students should be metacognitive and able to report back on their own progress (Skinner, 76, McInerney & Liem, 39, Chappuis et al, 15). Volante (2006) states, “students must be active partners in the assessment process” (136). The nature of this participation ideally includes the following:

1. Students are able to identify or describe the attributes of an ideal performance/product
2. Students are able to evaluate their own current ability and compare it to this ideal standard.

3. Students are able to decide what should be done next, set goals, and determine when they have achieved success. (Adapted from Chappuis & Stiggins, 41, Shepard 2005, 67, Shepard 2000, 10, Chappuis et al, 2009, Black et al, 85, Hattie & Timperley, 88).

When students are involved in assessment in this fashion, they are able to take ownership of their progress and success and fully realize and celebrate their accomplishments. In addition, they can adjust their strategies or even effort level depending on how they perceive their growth. (Hattie & Timperley, 90) An open dialogue between teachers and students, including frequent self-evaluation, demystifies assessment and removes concerns of fairness or favouritism. Students then feel more invested in and connected to the learning process.

The assessment cycle does not end with constructive feedback and student inclusion. In order for educators to best integrate assessment into their practice, it must inform and inspire future directions in their teaching. Various types of assessment should be completed throughout the teaching process. Pre-assessment, or gathering information about a student’s background knowledge, is vital to best practice teaching. Ideally, teachers will then be able to “use insights about a learner’s current understanding to alter the course of instruction” (Shepard 2005, 67). When teachers properly activate prior knowledge, teaching becomes increasingly specific, differentiated, and relevant. Assessment should then continue to influence instructional choices. Educators who use assessment results to direct their instruction “make more informed decisions” (Alberta,
15) and are able to “identify… the next cycle in the instructional sequence” (Alberta, 17). Assessment should be formative and indivisible from instructional planning (Black et al, 86). All assessment results, whether positive or negative, can be used to modify teaching and learning experiences to ensure optimal education. An effective teacher will encourage students to self assess, and should engage in the same process themselves. This creates a positive learning community where all participants engage in revision and improvement.

Best practice in assessment is not straightforward or singular in nature. It is a complex and demanding aspect of effective teaching, and has been the topic of much research in recent years. By incorporating ongoing, formative, reflective, diverse “assessment for learning” practices, educators can use assessment to promote learning instead of evaluation. This ideal assessment cycle not only enables considerable student gains, it also promotes constant improvement in teaching itself.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Novel Selection Process and Evaluation Criteria

Due to my interest in the transmission of cultural messages through literature, as well as the application of current best practices in teaching, I have chosen to focus on novels that are widely available and popular, thus influencing the greatest number of readers. Through my professional, scholarly, and recreational reading, I have come across a wide variety of primary texts with apprenticeship themes. Like apprenticeship itself, these texts range in focus from ancient to modern times. While it is difficult to pinpoint exact publication numbers, I have used sales rankings from Amazon books for some texts as a partial indicator of comparative popularity.

Yarbro’s 1984 novel Locadio’s Apprentice, for example, tells the story of a young Pompeian in 79 AD who is determined to be a doctor, despite his family’s financial restraints. Over the course of the novel, Yarbro narrates a number of lessons Locadio imparts on his young apprentice, and describes the growing respect between master and apprentice, which results in a partnership by the end of the story. Another ancient apprenticeship is depicted in Eloise Jarvis McGraw’s The Golden Goblet, winner of the Newbery Honor award in 1962. In this novel, young Ranofer is apprenticed to a local goldsmith in ancient Egypt and discovers that his brother is stealing from his master. This text also contains a number of scenes in which Ranofer is interacting with his master in an educational context as he learns the craft of goldsmithing. While these novels both illustrate teaching/learning relationships, they are both set during an ancient period where scanty evidence exists concerning the details and rules of typical
apprenticeship models (Westerman, 314). In addition, both novels are relatively dated, negatively influencing their current sales and recognition among modern young readers.

Though popular and well circulated, novels such as Linda Sue Park’s *A Single Shard* and Laurence Yep’s *The Tiger’s Apprentice* are not suitable for my study due to their traditional Asian cultural focus. As my research focuses on recent Western ideals of best practice in teaching, imposing this framework on Asian apprenticeship novels would be anatopistic. Similarly, Allan Say’s *The Ink Keeper’s Apprentice* takes place in Japan and concerns a young artist’s apprenticeship to a famous cartoonist. In addition to its Asian setting and cultural focus, this novel is partially autobiographical, which changes the nature of how Say depicts the teaching-learning relationship. Despite their focus on apprenticeship and teaching and learning, I have excluded these novels from my study.

Another reason for exclusion is a lack of significant plot devoted to the interplay between master and apprentice. Angie Sage’s *Septimus Heap* series, for example, details the adventures of Septimus, apprentice to ExtraOrdinary Wizard Marcia Overstrand. However, Sage narrates few formal lessons or informal teachings between master and apprentice. Instead, the stories focus on the adventures of Septimus and his growing discovery of magic. Though this series would be an ideal study because of its popularity, there is simply not enough instruction to be analyzed in the novels. Likewise, Ann Walsh’s *The Doctor’s Apprentice*, set in 1868 Barkerville, focuses on the struggles and drug addiction of the doctor himself, as opposed to the learning of his apprentice. In addition, though this book is a Canadian award winner, its lack of international presence or popularity (it is ranked 7 millionth in popularity by Amazon) reduces the scope of the novel’s influence.
The *Warrior* series is not only widely circulated but also widely translated, with popular versions all over the world, from China to Trinidad. Comprised of numerous mini-series and written by a team of authors under the pen name ‘Erin Hunter’, the books concern the adventures and traditions of wild cat clans. Though *Omen of the Stars: The Fourth Apprentice* deals in part with the mentor/apprentice relationship between young Dovepaw and experienced leader Lionblaze, the book is entirely focused on animal interactions, and as such, has fewer connections to the world of human apprenticeships. In addition, the novel contains very few teaching moments, instead focusing on the significance of omens and prophesies.

M. A. Wood’s *Master Deor’s Apprentice* is unsuitable for this study for a number of reasons. First, the master in question has many apprentices and does not teach the young stonemason protagonist directly. More importantly, the novel was published some time ago (1979) and is no longer in print, thus greatly influencing its level of modern recognition.

My readings on apprenticeship throughout history indicate the prevalence of male apprentices and male masters. Though some female apprentices (especially daughters of craftsmen) are documented in a variety of time periods, women and girls were a “tiny minority” among apprentices in Europe through the Middle Ages and early modern period (De Munk, 24). Thus, my primary text selection focuses on male master/apprenticeship relationships. Though Karen Cushman’s popular, award winning novels *The Midwife’s Apprentice* and *Matilda Bone* portray teaching and learning relationships in detail, both novels feature female protagonist apprentices. Similarly, Love’s *The Puppeteer’s Apprentice* concerns a girl who wishes to learn from a travelling
puppeteer, whom she later discovers is a woman. While these quality novels may be of interest to young readers, especially young female readers, they do not represent the typical apprenticeship experience.

All apprenticeship novels fell into two genres: historical fiction, fantasy, or a mixture of both. While historical fiction can be both fascinating and educational, the fantasy genre is increasingly prevalent in young adult reading. The overwhelming influence of series such as *Harry Potter, Percy Jackson*, and *Twilight* has widened the scope, popularity, and perceived marketability of the fantasy genre. This is evident in the New York Times Bestsellers lists. For the week of August 12, 2012, fantasy stories represented eight out of ten bestselling children’s series and six out of ten bestselling children’s chapter books. In addition, the fantasy genre offers more freedom for authors to construct their own worlds and rules without the constraints of historical accuracy. For this reason, I chose to focus on novels that bridge both genres.

Three apprenticeship novels were excluded for their lack of fantasy elements as well as other considerations. Cynthia De Felice’s *The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whittaker* takes place in 1849 Connecticut and tells the story of a young doctor’s apprentice during the consumption outbreak. Though it is an award-winning book and fairly popular (ranked under 1 millionth in popularity on Amazon), the focus between master and apprentice is not on instruction but rather on the doctor’s internal debate about the nature of the disease. Paul Fleishman’s *Path of the Pale Horse* also illustrates a doctor/student apprenticeship in time of disease, in this instance the Philadelphia yellow fever outbreak of 1793. Likewise, little learning between mentor and student is detailed, especially because the mentor in question is sick and incapacitated for much of the novel. Thus,
both of these novels, though reasonably well known narratives with male master/apprentice depictions, are not suitable for this study.

Four significant factors make John Flanagan’s *The Ranger’s Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan* and Joseph Delany’s *The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch* ideal for this study. First, both novels focus on learning and teaching between a male mentor and young male apprentice. The learners are both young teenagers, making them not only typical in age for the majority of historical apprentices, but also widely appealing to a children’s and young adult audience. Also, both novels feature well-rounded adult figures whose lessons and instruction form the majority of the narrative. They both have medieval European-esque settings with some fantasy elements. Apprenticeships during this time were widespread and well recorded, and the fantasy elements assist in both the novels’ popularity and creative license. Further, both novels have received multiple awards and are widely distributed and very popular. *The Ranger’s Apprentice*, for example, is ranked 16,000 in Amazon sales and has sold over 3 million copies in 16 countries. It is the first of a series of ten novels, and Flanagan is currently working on a spinoff series. *The Last Apprentice* is ranked under 100,000 in popularity, is also book one of a series of ten bestselling books. United Artists has optioned *The Ranger’s Apprentice* for a possible feature film, and Warner Bros is releasing *Seventh Son*, a movie based on *The Last Apprentice*, in January 2014. In addition, the novels have a similar international publication history. *The Ranger’s Apprentice* was published in Australia in 2004 and then in the United States in 2005. *The Last Apprentice* was published in Great Britain in 2004 and subsequently in the United States in 2005. This similarity in publication allows for fair comparison of teaching methods described in the novels.
Altogether, these novels embody popular, recent, historical fantasy mentor-apprentice children’s literature.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Best Practice in Education

Best practice research in education suggests four main areas of consideration when defining effective teaching: the educator as an individual, curricular scope, instructional practices, and assessment methods. Excellence in each of these areas is necessary for a learning situation to reflect best practice. As an apprentice-master framework has been the dominant form of individual education for many hundreds of years, these best practice expectations can be applied to the teachers, or masters, in these circumstances.

The research identifies that an ideal teacher/master, as an individual, must be enthusiastic, confident, and positive, thereby passing these attributes on to the apprentice. They should believe in the importance of what they are teaching and in the efficacy of their station as an educator. They should set a sound moral example to their apprentices, in actions as well as worldview. They should establish a strong and caring relationship with their apprentices. This relationship includes a genuine interest in their apprentice as an individual, and a constant concern for their well-being. They should place the apprentice as the center of their teaching philosophy and ensure that they are acting as guiding mentors as opposed to distant information presenters. Masters should have high expectations for their apprentices in terms of both behaviour and learning. They should be highly educated experts in their field, constantly seeking to improve their own knowledge and expertise while contributing to their field (McInernewy & Leim 187, Skinner, 53, Wiseman & Hunt, 143, Smith & Strahan, 365).
In order to follow best practice, masters must carefully consider what they are teaching their apprentice. Emphasizing higher-level thinking skills and critical problem solving is much more effective than fact and repetition based study. Masters should ensure apprentices are aware of and proficient in the use of available technology and resources. Course of study should include not only information but also moral and ethical development. Curriculum must be relevant and practical in nature, and feature apprentice input or interests when possible (Kelting-Gibson, 42, Weiss & Pasley, 24, Popham, 20, Parons & Harding 8).

The nature of learning experiences is paramount to an effective apprenticeship. Masters must be highly organized and prepared to ensure they are utilizing time and space effectively. Skills and concepts should be taught at a pace that challenges apprentices while not overwhelming them. Assistance and scaffolding should be consistently provided. Apprentices should be aware of high behaviour expectations, and discipline issues should be dealt with firmly but respectfully, providing not just punishment but also the opportunity for learning. Research shows the benefit of co-operative learning and group interaction. An effective master should seek to foster these opportunities, despite the one-on-one nature of most apprentices. Learning experiences should be hands-on, experiential, and varied. The effective mentor should be able to tailor their teaching style to different learning experiences and purposes. He or she needs to be proficient in direct teaching, facilitating discussion, and supporting students in action-based learning and inquiry. Masters should carefully consider how their questioning fosters apprentice learning, and encourage their charges to frequently ask
questions and clarify their understanding (McInerney & Liem, 44, Wiseman & Hunt, 144, Luarillard, 1993).

Evaluation and assessment practices are essential to effective teaching. Best practice indicates that masters should cater their assessment to their apprentice’s learning and skill level. High stakes singular testing does not reliably encourage understanding. Apprentices should be aware of goals and expectations, and assessment should be frequent and ongoing. Masters should consider the nature of assessment tasks, and ensure they are realistic and contextual. Apprentices need constant constructive feedback so that they are able to identify areas in which they need to grow, and take steps to ensure their own improvement. Finally, masters must use the results of their ongoing assessment to inform future learning tasks, and their own instruction (Clark, 2008; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Shepard, 2000; Volante, 2006).

These key aspects of best practice teaching form a lens through which educators can be evaluated for efficacy. It is argued here that due to the prevalence of the master-apprentice model throughout the history of education, these same standards of efficacy can also be used to evaluate masters. In the novels Rangers Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan and The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch, two masters are depicted: Halt and Old Gregory (The Spook). The publication date of these novels (2004) corresponds with the timeframe of much of the best practice research referenced in this thesis. While it would be anachronistic to expect real historical master-mentors to adhere to modern concepts of best practice, both novels where written in recent years and can therefore be compared to current ideologies. The four aspects of best practice will therefore be used as a lens through which these texts will be explored. This thesis will apply the lens of
best practice teaching to a close reading of *Rangers Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan* and *The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch*. By comparing the masters Halt and Old Gregory to standards for educational excellence, a measure of their depicted efficacy can be achieved.
CHAPTER 4: *The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch*

Using the lens of best practice (as outlined in Chapter 3), this chapter explores the mentor/teacher – apprentice/student relationship in *The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch*. This novel is the first in the series *The Wardstone Chronicles* by Joseph Delaney. The series follows Tom Ward, the seventh son of a seventh son who is apprenticed to John Gregory to become a Spook. Old Gregory as he is known, has been a Spook for almost sixty years, ridding villages of boggarts, witches and other evils but he is old and needs someone to take his place. He has had twenty-nine apprentices before Tom but none of these apprentices succeeded. Tom is the last hope and this series of books follows his adventures during his Spook apprenticeship.

4.1 The Teacher as an Individual

Best practice research emphasizes the importance of a strong, caring relationship between teacher and student. This is especially important in Tom’s case, as he is isolated from his family and other people his age. At first, the Spook John Gregory does not appear particularly caring or attentive to Tom. In fact, when he first meets Tom he is so skeptical he questions the boy’s qualifications: “‘You’re sure he’s a seventh son?’ he asked. He was looking down at me and shaking his head doubtfully” (1). John Gregory also comments that Tom is a “bit small for his age” (4), a physical trait about which Tom, as a youngest brother in a farming family, is no doubt sensitive. Tom’s Mam reassures her son that he will develop a strong relationship with his mentor, telling him, “You’ll have your master to talk to. He’ll be your teacher, and no doubt he’ll eventually become your friend” (15). However, the relationship between John Gregory and Tom does not begin well. The Spook does not call Tom by name, but instead addresses him as “lad,”
and does little to make the boy feel comfortable or welcome in their first hours together. In fact, when Tom is apprehensive about passing the spirits of dead soldiers on Hangman’s Hill, the Spook derides him: “If you’re frightened of something on your own doorstep, you’ll be of little use to me” (25). His actions in this case are not in keeping with a kind and caring teacher. Later, he appears to show more warmth toward the boy. The Spook has Tom confront his fear of the spirits, and he does “put his hand on [Tom’s] shoulder and guides [him] nearer to the hanging men” (26). This could be interpreted as a kind gesture meant to support Tom while also prompting him to grow and learn. Later, when showing Tom the witches incarcerated in his garden, the Spook continues to be supportive, but matter-of-fact, as Tom reports: “He smiled and patted me on the shoulder. ‘There’s nothing to be afraid of. It’s just a dead witch.’” (86).

Although the Spook takes time to reassure Tom he does not coddle him or ease him into the realities of the job. During the journey from Tom’s home to the Spook’s home, the Spook demands that Tom keep up with him even when Tom develops blisters. In addition during the journey the Spook keeps the boy in a state of near-starvation. In Tom’s account of the journey, he says, “I’d never been so hungry… I wondered where we’d be staying in Chipenden and if we’d get something proper to eat there” (71). Instead of offering sympathy, the Spook tells him: “hunger’s something you’re going to have to get used to” (34). But John Gregory does not subject Tom to anything that he himself is not prepared to tolerate; the Spook also eats very little food and often takes long journeys on foot. Tom, and the reader, begins to understand that while the Spook is not warm, he is quietly caring. He provides Tom with a cozy room outfitted with bed, dresser, and chair, and he encourages the boy to eat his fill of tasty food when they are...
not busy working. Tom respects his master and realizes that his difficult training is to prepare him for a difficult job.

Over time, the Spook’s gruff but fair attitude toward Tom earns him the boy’s respect and loyalty. This is proof of the trusting relationship that has been built between master and apprentice. When Tom goes into town to pick up supplies, he refuses to abandon the Spook’s groceries to a group of troublemaking boys. He is also offended by the way Alice (a girl he meets and who is related to a family of witches) speaks about his master:

I was shocked to hear her call the Spook “Old Gregory.” I knew he wouldn’t like being called that, and it told me two things. First, the girl had little respect for him, and second, she wasn’t the least bit afraid of him. (109)

After Tom saves a young boy from Bony Lizzie (Alice’s aunt), he brings the young boy back to the Spook’s house because of his faith in his master’s protection and strength. After his harrowing experience saving the boy, he reports, “I was warm and comfortable and I felt at peace in the Spook’s house, which was one of the safest places in the whole wide world” (197). While neither Tom nor John Gregory is gushing in their praise of the other, it is clear that they hold each other in high regard. While not a textbook example of a perfect teacher-student relationship, there is evidence of trust and care.

An effective teacher sets a strong example of morality and integrity. This is an area in which Tom is conflicted in his view of his master. In some ways, John Gregory conducts himself with honour and integrity. For example, both his life and career are devoted to fighting evil and darkness and he constantly exposes himself to discomfort and
danger in order to help others, sometimes receiving nothing in return. Though he is exacting in his treatment of Tom, he sets an example by indulging in few luxuries himself. When travelling, he shares his small amount of cheese equally with Tom, impressing upon him the need to stay hungry and sharp when working (33). The Spook also acts as a role model by demonstrating polite manners to Tom. When Tom compliments the Spook’s boggart, as he has been taught, the Spook responds positively in order to reinforce Tom’s good behaviour.

Nonetheless, Tom is left doubting the ethics of his mentor. John Gregory has dug a pit and imprisoned a live witch, Mother Malkin, inside. Tom questions his decision, thinking, “it seemed a terrible, cruel thing to keep any living creature – even a witch - in the ground, and I couldn’t imagine my Mam liking the idea much” (88). Alice further influences him, she argues, “He’s a very cruel man, Old Gregory… Poor Mother Malkin’s been in that damp, dark hole in the ground for almost thirteen years now. Is it right to treat an old woman so badly?” (140). Tom allows himself to be convinced by Alice and his own doubts. He demonstrates a lack of faith in John Gregory’s scruples by assisting Alice and feeding cakes to Mother Malkin. Eventually, he comes to regret this decision and regains his faith in his master’s morality:

“I think Mr. Gregory must’ve had a very good reason for putting her in that pit,” I said slowly. “I’m just his new apprentice, so how can I know what’s best? When he gets back I’m going to tell him everything that’s happened.” (158) When he discovers that Mother Malkin is in the pit because she has murdered many young women, he gains further trust in the integrity of his master. This trust is reinforced
when Tom reads the Spook’s journal account of the incident and realizes the Spook struggled in his decision to imprison the witch. Tom observes:

The Spook seemed to be arguing with himself in the account. He clearly didn’t like burying her alive but explained why it had to be done. He believed that it was too dangerous to kill her: once slain, she had the power to return and would be even stronger and more dangerous than before. (167)

John Gregory’s self-doubt and indecision cause Tom, as well as the reader, to respect his morality all the more. John Gregory emerges as a teacher who does not think he knows all the answers, who questions and considers his actions carefully, and who aspires to do the right thing even when it is difficult. By showing Tom his fallibility as well as his thought processes, he sets a strong example for Tom’s future decision making. Later, the Spook admits his doubts and is transparent about his thought process in regards to Alice:

“I just don’t know what to do for the best. It’s not just her. We’ve others to think about. Innocents who might suffer in the future. She’s seen too much and she knows too much for her own good. It could go either way with her, and I don’t know if it’s safe to let her go.” (244)

In addition, he seeks the advice of both Tom and his Mam in an effort to make a sound moral decision. In the end he shows Tom he is fair as well as compassionate, telling Alice, “I’m going to give you a chance, girl. It’s up to you whether you take it” (245).

Effective teachers should “demonstrate a student-centered approach to instruction” (Smith, 2004, 365). This is not often the case in Tom’s apprenticeship with the Spook. John Gregory is frequently engaged in his work as a Spook when Tom most needs his assistance. Though John Gregory places high importance on Tom’s learning, he
is also a working professional, and his absence occasionally makes Tom feel abandoned (135). Unfortunately, it is during the Spook’s absences that Tom makes a number of mistakes that later prove dangerous for him and others, for example, feeding the cakes to Mother Malkin. If the Spook was wholly and unilaterally devoted to Tom’s education, these events may have been avoided.

When working directly with Tom, the Spook does take advantage of learning opportunities. On their travels past Hangman’s hill, the Spook halts their journey because of Tom’s fear and takes the time to explain the difference between a ghost and a ghast. He also frequently stresses the importance of Tom’s intuition and thought processes, encouraging him to solve problems independently. He guides Tom’s learning and allows him to make choices about important issues such as Alice’s future:

“Anyway, I’m going to leave it up to you,” said the Spook. “Either bring the girl back and we’ll bind her in the pit, or take her to her aunt in Staumin. The choice is yours. Use your instinct for what’s right. You’ll know what to do.” (324)

While John Gregory shows a student-centered attitude when he is able, because of the overwhelming demands of being a Spook he is unable to consistently make Tom’s learning his sole priority.

John Gregory frequently demonstrates high student expectations, another key characteristic of effective teachers. As a master in a demanding and deadly profession, he insists that his apprentices learn quickly and perform competently. Because of his exacting nature, many of his previous apprentices have failed their training. As Tom’s Mam states, “He’s trained many, but precious few completed their time… and those that did aren’t a patch on you” (129). Though these words could be interpreted as merely the
sentiments of a proud mother, Tom later discovers a list of thirty previous apprentices, “written in the Spook’s own handwriting” (168). He understands that they have all failed the Spook’s challenging training, and speculates on the nature of their failure:

“I supposed that a lot were crossed out simply because they’d failed to make the grade as apprentices, perhaps not even making it to the end of the first month. Those who had died were more worrying.” (168)

Tom quickly learns about the Spook’s high standards. Tom is expected to walk longer distances than ever before and carry his own belongings as well as those of his master. When they leave Tom’s farm for Chipenden, the Spook explains, “we depend on neither man nor beast to get us where we need to go. If you rely on your own good two legs, then they won’t let you down” (32). Tom is expected to endure fatigue, hunger, and fear, as these are mainstays in the daily life of a Spook. Each of John Gregory’s tasks must be completed with precision. Tom reports on the task of digging holes, “it took me hours to get it right because the spook was a perfectionist” (119). Tom is also expected to learn quickly and follow direction without repetition. When he enters the kitchen before the prescribed time and receives a beating from the boggart, the Spook shows no sympathy: “I warned you about going down early… no doubt you got your ears boxed. Let that be a lesson to you, lad. Next time it might be far worse” (82).

A best practice teacher is thoroughly knowledgeable about their subject matter and is an expert in their field. This is one area in which John Gregory excels. He is widely acknowledged as an accomplished Spook. Tom’s Mam tells him, “your new master’s still strong…for nearly sixty years, he’s walked the county lines doing his duty” (15). The townspeople all know the Spook, though they prefer not to interact with him.
When Tom enters the butcher shop, the other customers fall silent when the Spook’s name is mentioned. His accomplishments are also well known, as evidenced by one boy’s explanation of Bony Lizzie: “Lizzie and her grandmother spent a whole winter here before Gregory sorted them out. My dad’s always going on about them. They were just about the scariest witches there’ve ever been in these parts” (154).

John Gregory schools Tom on his vast knowledge of the supernatural. He explains the difference between ghasts and ghosts (28), and describes various viewpoints about ley lines through the County. He defines types of boggarts and explains how to use salt and iron to ward off evil. Tom finds further evidence of John Gregory’s vast expertise in the Spook’s private library:

I recognized the Spook’s handwriting. Flicking through the pages, I realized that it was a sort of diary. It recorded each job he’d done, the time taken in travelling and the amount he’d been paid. Most importantly, it explained just how each boggart, ghost, and witch had been dealt with. (163)

Tom understands how knowledgeable his master is, and has faith in his ability. When Alice tells him that her family has planned a trap for John Gregory, Tom thinks to himself, “I didn’t believe that the Spook would be so easy to kill or he wouldn’t have survived for so many years” (160). His faith is confirmed when the Spook returns and defeats bony Lizzie.

4.2 Curriculum

Best practice research emphasizes the importance of curricular content. Effective educators should emphasize the process of learning and problem solving, rather than rote memorization. Curriculum should address the whole student, including moral and ethical
development. Teachers should make an effort to incorporate technology into learning, and ensure students are aware of appropriate uses of technology. Learning outcomes should be relevant and practical in nature, and should take into account student interests and abilities.

John Gregory is in a fortunate curricular position in that he is able to decide what he would like to teach and when he would like to teach it. In his instruction, he effectively balances factual learning outcomes with higher-level thinking and process-based skills. The Spook often asks Tom questions that encourage the boy to think through a situation and find his own solution. When he brings Tom to the haunted house and tells him to enter the cellar at exactly midnight, he confirms, “how will you know it’s midnight?” (42). Tom then remembers the sound of the town clock. By refraining from giving Tom answers, the Spook forces Tom to reason, collect clues, and explain his thinking process. As a result, when Tom is left in the house alone and thinks he hears his mother calling at the front door, he carefully considers the evidence, remembers the Spook’s guiding advice, and reasons that it cannot possibly be his Mam at the door. This scene illustrates the Spook’s effective teaching of problem solving skills. Tom further demonstrates these skills later in the story, when he is trying to locate Alice. He remembers, “Alice had said she lived ‘yonder’” (153), and seeks the help of the village boys to find the girl. When Tom inadvertently causes Mother Malkin’s escape, he knows that he must solve the problem on his own. In the Spook’s absence, he turns to the boggart for advice and help, and researches information to rectify the situation.

One of the Spook’s instructional priorities is coaching Tom to develop and trust his intuition. When Tom refuses to give the village boys any food, even though “some of
them did look really hungry” (112), the Spook explains that Tom is allowed to make decisions on his own without his masters direction:

“Then next time trust your instincts and use your initiative,” said the Spook. “Trust the voice inside you. It’s rarely wrong. A spook depends a lot on that because it can sometimes mean the difference between life and death. So that’s another thing we need to find out about you. Whether or not your instincts can be relied on.”

(112)

Sometimes, however, Tom’s instincts are wrong, or not fully informed. For example, he decides to feed Mother Malkin and justifies his decision with the Spook’s earlier advice: “The Spook had told me to trust my instincts, and after weighing things in balance, I felt that I was doing the right thing” (144). Despite this setback, the Spook is generally understanding of Tom’s mistakes and continues to encourage him to develop and trust his intuition.

Another aspect of best practice curriculum is incorporation of technology. Obviously, the technology present in *The Last Apprentice* is vastly different from what is available in the modern classroom. However, by examining the extent to which the Spook uses tools and advances available in his society, parallels can still be drawn. For example, while John Gregory prefers to walk on his travels rather than using a horse or horse and cart, Tom notices that he has expensive and well-made boots, which it can be argued amount to the best tool available to him for the task of walking. Nonetheless, there is a definite absence of technological instruction. Though Tom suspects a number of objects in the house are magic, the Spook does not address Tom’s suspicions or include these items in his lessons.
An effective teacher ensures that curriculum promotes morality and social justice. This is related to the earlier discussion concerning the teacher’s ethical and moral example. Not only should the teacher represent high moral standards, he or she should also take the time to explain and foster social justice in lessons. The Spook demonstrates this in a variety of ways, though occasionally, Tom doubts his master. First, the Spook pauses in their initial journey at Hangman’s hill, where Tom is scared of the spirits of dead soldiers. He asks Tom how the soldiers must have felt, and takes the boy through an exercise in empathy. Later, at the haunted house, the Spook again structures his lesson around empathy for the haunting spirits, which leads Tom to say, “I felt sorry for the poor wife who’d been murdered, and I felt sorry for the miner who’d killed her” (59). Though Tom believes the Spook is cruel for imprisoning Mother Malkin in the pit, the Spook eventually teaches him the relative kindness of his decision. He explains that the other methods of dealing with witches are eating their hearts or burning them alive and elaborates,

“[I]f we practice either method, we’re no better than the witch we kill,” said the Spook. “Both are barbaric. The only alternative left is the pit. That’s cruel as well, but we do it to protect the innocents, those who’d be her future victims.” (204)

Thus, Tom begins to understand that his master is making sound moral decisions, and is coaching his apprentice in the reasoning behind these decisions.

Curricular research dictates that learning outcomes should be relevant and practical. This is an area of notable strength in the Spook’s lessons and Tom is quickly engaged in relevant, real world learning. For example, Tom practices digging holes in readiness for binding errant boggarts, and becomes an expert at the skill. When Bony
Lizzie tries to bury him in a pit, he observes, “I remember thinking that with all the practice I’d had, I could have dug one far better” (223). The Spook also gives Tom practical advice about the universal warding properties of salt and iron, which later saves many lives. Tom, however, feels there are things lacking in the relevance of his education. He internally complains, “most of my training so far had been about boggarts, with little bits on ghasts and ghosts, while all my problems had been caused by witches” (300). Apart from this complaint, it seems the Spook successfully ensures all learning is practical and applicable to real-world situations.

Finally, effective curriculum should take into account the interests and input of the student. Teachers should allow opportunity for choice, and for students to pursue their areas of curiosity. While the topics of instruction during Tom’s first year as an apprentice are limited to boggarts and subjects such as botany Tom, nonetheless, reveals, “the lessons were the most interesting part of each day” (116), suggesting that John Gregory is ensuring lessons are in line with his apprentice’s interests. In addition, he takes the time to listen carefully to Tom’s questions, and explain or discuss Tom’s areas of curiosity. While John Gregory does not invite Tom to be part of curricular planning, he does make room in his lessons for Tom’s interests and input.

4.3 Instructional Practices

Best practice research places significant emphasis on the nature of learning experiences. Teachers should plan lessons carefully and approach teaching in a prepared and organized manner. Lessons should progress at a challenging but not overwhelming pace, with high expectations that are respectfully reinforced. Learning should be hands
on, co-operative, and varied in nature. Teachers should foster curiosity and carefully structure their questioning to enhance student learning.

The Spook structures lessons in two ways: formal sessions and informal, situation-based instruction. He appears well-organized during formal lessons, explaining to Tom what he will be learning in his first year as an apprentice (116). He has the boy write out topics for the day, indicating a premeditated lesson sequence. In addition, informal learning takes place throughout the day as the Spook and Tom encounter different situations. Much of this learning is unplanned in nature, but valuable nonetheless. For example, the Spook explains the nature of ghast markings when Tom observes one on the cellar door. He also tells his apprentice about wolves and ley lines as they pass areas of note. In other instances, the Spook’s instruction seems less organized and more spontaneous. When Tom upsets the boggart with his early arrival, the Spook suggests, “I’ll show you round the garden. We’ve got to start somewhere, and it’ll pass the time until breakfast’s ready” (83). As the job is often dependent on the needs of others, Tom finds the pacing of his instruction somewhat erratic. For example, when the Spook leaves to take care of a problem in Pendle, he does not plan for Tom’s instruction in his absence. Tom complains, “the Spook hadn’t left me any tasks to do, so I’d nothing to fill my day with” (150). So, while the Spook often appears well organized, there remain some inconsistencies in his planning for instruction.

The pace of instruction demonstrated throughout the book is brisk and challenging. From the beginning Tom is pushed to his limits, given only short breaks and minimal rest on their travels (33). During formal lessons at the Spook’s house, Tom
continues to be pressured: “after that my life settled into a busy routine. The Spook taught me fast and made me write until my wrist ached and my eyes stung” (115).

At times, it seems that the Spook’s pace of instruction is too challenging. There are a number of instances when Tom feels overwhelmed and in danger because of his lack of knowledge and the Spook’s absences. When Tom is left alone at the haunted house, the Spook asks, “Well, lad, I’ve got business to attend to so I’ll be off, but I’ll be back later. Know what you have to do?” Tom responds, “No, sir” (40), but is still left alone for the night. At other times, there is evidence of due diligence in the Spook’s instruction. When Tom upsets the boggart and perceives himself to be in peril, his thoughts make it clear that the Spook did caution him:

The Spook had warned me not to come down early, and I suddenly felt that I was in real danger. As soon as I had entertained that thought, something hit me very hard on the back of the head; I staggered toward the door, almost losing my balance and falling headlong. (81)

The Spook is also careful to warn Tom about the witches. He cautions, “She’d love to get her hands on a lad like you. So stay well away. Promise me now that you won’t go near. Let me hear you say it” (88). Both of these instances show that while the Spook sets a challenging pace, he makes an effort to anticipate problems and ensure the safety of his apprentice.

In effective instruction, teachers respectfully reinforce high behavioural expectations. Though the Spook clearly has high behavioural expectations of his apprentice, he is somewhat demeaning and dismissive in his criticism of Tom. For example, when Tom is unsure of his task in the haunted house, the Spook responds:
“Well, it’s what I told you earlier. Weren’t you listening? You need to be alert, not
dreaming. Anyway, it’s nothing very difficult” (41). In another instance, the Spook
becomes frustrated with Tom’s note-taking: “‘Look,’ he said, ‘you’re going to have to
learn to write faster than that. There’s a lot to learn’” (101). At other times, however, the
Spook is fair with his criticism. Tom keeps his meeting with Alice a secret, and the
Spook is understandably disappointed: “You should have told me about meeting the girl.
It would have saved everybody a lot of trouble” (200). In addition to being justified in
some of his criticism, Mr. Gregory even appears understanding and lenient when Tom
deals too generously with a boggart. He reassures his apprentice, “not to worry, it’s
business as usual and life goes on” (208). Thus, when it comes to discipline issues, the
Spook is inconsistent and oscillates between being overly harsh to overly lenient.

Since the work of a Spook is solitary, and others prefer to avoid the company of a
Spook, there is little if any opportunity for co-operative learning in the studies of a
Spook’s apprentice. However, while the work of a Spook is solitary, John Gregory
facilitates hands-on learning in his instruction. Before any lessons involving writing or
books, Tom spends a night alone in a haunted house. The Spook explains the task:

“You just have to spend the night here alone. I bring all my new apprentices to this
old house on their first night so I can find out what they’re made of. Oh, but there’s
one thing I haven’t told you. At midnight I’ll expect you to go down into the cellar
and face whatever it is that’s lurking there. Cope with that and you’re well on your
way to being taken on permanently.” (41)

Most of Tom’s learning experiences are similarly tactile and productive in nature: For
example, in order to learn how to bind boggarts, Tom must dig a nine-foot pit, create a
protective mixture, and spread it evenly, which he reports is, “like painting but harder work” (120). Instead of learning from texts, the Spook has Tom create his own: “although the Spook said he had lots of maps upstairs in his library, it seemed I always had to do things the hard way, so he started me off by making me draw a map of my own” (121). By having his apprentice create maps with his own hands, the Spook not only ensures that Tom is more likely to retain the information, but also fosters his future map-drawing skills. Though Tom confesses, “I always went to bed tired and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow” (116), he is definitely engaged in valuable hands-on learning experiences.

Effective educators are able to instruct using a variety of methods or approaches. As previously discussed, the Spook uses both formal, direct instruction, and more informal instruction in the form of discussion, inquiry, and experience. During direct instruction, the Spook lectures about topics such as boggarts or botany, and Tom must take detailed and organized notes. The Spook also teaches Tom through experience. In the haunted house, for example, Tom learns by completing the Spook’s task and enduring the fear and danger that is a key aspect of the job. Later, the Spook teaches Tom about boggart binding by having him repeatedly dig practice pits. John Gregory frequently engages Tom in discussions to promote learning. He seems to enjoy asking his apprentice questions and coaching the boy’s thought process. After Tom’s encounter with Mother Malkin, the Spook asks, “What have you been up to? Tell me what’s been happening here. Start at the beginning and finish at the end, leaving nothing out” (200). He and Tom also discuss the morality of destroying witches (204), and the boy’s feelings when confronted with ghasts (26-29).
In Tom’s primary conflict in the novel, his interactions with Mother Malkin, he
learns through inquiry and through trial and error. However, the Spook does not facilitate
this learning. Instead, as a result of the Spook’s absence, Tom finds himself alone in an
inquiry situation and he must solve the problem of how to best deal with Mother Malkin,
given his personal morals and his lack of resources. Tom attempts a number of strategies,
including asking the advice of the boggart, seeking information from the village people,
and researching in the Spook’s library. He is eventually successful in staving off the evil
advances of the witch, but this is done without the Spook’s guidance or scaffolding.

An educator’s questioning skills can greatly influence students’ engagement with
learning and depth of thinking. The Spook demonstrates excellent questioning skills
with his apprentice. He takes time to ask both general questions that cause Tom to hone
his observation skills, and specific probing questions that help his apprentice see other
perspectives. This exchange, on Hangman’s hill, illustrates Mr. Gregory’s strength in
this general-to-specific questioning format:

“Look at him,” said the Spook. “What do you see?”

“A dead soldier,” I replied, my voice beginning to wobble.

“How old does he look?”

“Seventeen at the most.”

“Good. Well done, lad. Now, tell me, do you still feel scared?”

“A bit. I don’t like being so close to him.”

“Why? There’s nothing to be afraid of. Nothing that can hurt you. Think about
what it must have been like for him. Concentrate on him rather than yourself. How
must he have felt? What would be the worst thing?” (26)
Through this conversation, the Spook helps Tom overcome his fear of ghasts, and encourages him to analyze situations factually, but with empathy. The Spook constantly questions throughout his instruction to illicit prior knowledge, check for understanding, and confirm instructions. Many of his questions are guiding but open ended, asking Tom if he notices anything unusual (85), or how he has arrived at a particular conclusion (200). The Spook’s questions show his ability to confirm knowledge and recall, and also to promote critical thinking and analysis.

In addition to posing thoughtful questions, the Spook excels at promoting Tom’s curiosity and questioning. He often checks to see if his pupil has questions, asking: “any questions?” (41) Or reassuring, “don’t be afraid to ask questions” (99). Throughout his beginning apprenticeship, Tom has queries about ghasts versus ghosts, about the Spook’s summer and winter houses, about wolves, boggarts, and witches, and about proper binding procedures. The Spook responds to each of Tom’s questions with patience, detail, and care. As a result, Tom feels at ease when seeking information, and is fully engaged in his lessons.

4.4 Assessment

The final key component of best practice instruction is assessment. Evaluative practices should avoid singular, high stakes tests and should include pre-assessment and ongoing, summative assessment. Students should be aware of the nature and scope of assessments, and should be involved in self-evaluation. In addition, teachers should give frequent constructive feedback, and use assessment to inform future instruction.

Though the Spook does not use one singular assessment tool when judging his apprentices, there is no doubt that his tests are high-stakes. Tom’s first individual test is
in the haunted house. Tom realizes the consequences of potential failure, saying, “if I
failed the Spook’s test, I’d probably be on my way back home as soon as it came light”
(54). Tom fears not only failure but also mortal injury. During the encounter with various
supernatural forces, he describes the following sensations: “my chest was being crushed”,
“I was going to be buried alive”, “I was paralyzed and couldn’t move a muscle” (51).

The Spook intentionally evokes fear and panic in his apprentice in order to gauge his
reaction. While it is true that a future Spook will need to respond to these emotions with
a level head, this test is not in keeping with best practice research about high-stakes
assessment.

The Spook does integrate a degree of ongoing assessment into his instruction. He
asks questions both at the beginning of Tom’s apprenticeship and throughout their time
together, analyzing his previous knowledge and his reactions to learning tasks. He asks
Tom about his previous travelling experience and his encounters with ghasts and ghosts.
He checks for understanding frequently during formal lessons in which Tom is taking
notes. During one instance where Tom’s intuition leads him wrong, the Spook reassures
him with a statement that correlates with assessment-for-learning philosophy: “He who
never makes a mistake never makes anything. It’s part of learning the job” (321).

Some of this ongoing evaluation incorporates another aspect of best practice:
student self-assessment. After a few weeks together, the Spook explains that Tom needs
to decide his suitability for himself:

“You’ve passed your month’s trial, so you can tell your dad that, if you want to
carry on, I’ll be visiting him in the autumn to collect my ten guineas. You’ve the
makings of a good apprentice, but it’s up to you, lad. If you don’t come back, then
I’ll know you’ve decided against it. Otherwise I’ll expect you back within the week. Then I’ll give you five years’ training that’ll make you almost as good at the job as I am.” (123)

The Spook has his own opinions about Tom’s progress, but he encourages his apprentice to be introspective. Tom must examine his own skills and interest in the profession, and report back. By including Tom in the assessment process, the Spook makes assessment more meaningful and also fosters the skill of metacognition. Later, it is evident that Tom continues to self evaluate, as he explains his regret for some of his decisions: “I realized I’d been really stupid. If only I’d told the Spook about my talk with Alice, he’d have realized that Lizzie was back and would have done something about it” (155). Though Tom is critical of his actions and their consequences, his self-assessment creates a valuable learning experience.

Another area in which the Spook excels as a mentor is his provision of frequent constructive feedback. He often expresses to his apprentice the ways he has performed well. After facing the ghasts on Hangman’s hill, the Spook stops to debrief with Tom and offer detailed advice:

“Well done, lad. You’re learning. We’re the seventh sons of seventh sons, and we have the gift of seeing things that others can’t. But that gift can sometimes be a curse… The trick is to concentrate on what you can see and stop thinking about yourself. It works every time. It was a terrible sight, my lad, but they’re just ghasts.” (28)

Though Tom is shaken, he is encouraged by the experience and by his mentor’s praise. When Tom is unsure of an answer about boggarts but shares his thought process, the
Spook tells him, “That’s good twice over, lad. You’ve remembered what I’ve told you and you’ve shown yourself to be someone who doesn’t make wild guesses” (97). By taking time and care to explain the specific behaviours he is pleased with, the Spook conveys valuable positive reinforcement. Even when Tom makes mistakes, the Spook’s feedback highlights areas of strength, thereby encouraging Tom’s confidence and growth: “… you did all right for a new apprentice. You showed courage, real courage, and you saved a child’s life” (201).

Ideally, assessment results should be used to advise successive lesson planning. Because the novel follows the thought process of Tom, and not his master, evidence of instructional thought processes must be inferred from the direct interactions reported, and the reactions of the apprentice. In some instances, it is clear that assessment will dictate whether or not Tom will continue in his learning. For example, in the haunted house, the Spook tells Tom, “…there’s just you, me, and the dark. Can you stand it? Are you fit to be my apprentice?” (61) This veiled threat indicates that Tom’s failure in this task will mean general failure of his apprenticeship contract. In other cases, the Spook appears to alter his instruction when he realizes a gap in Tom’s knowledge. He shows him how to properly take notes (page 101) and assures the boy that he will teach him Latin (page 207). Presumably, the very fact that the Spook continues with Tom’s lessons indicates the apprentice’s ongoing success. Other than these specific incidents, however, there is no direct evidence that the Spook uses assessment to inform future instruction. While he is effective in the areas of feedback and student self-assessment, the Spook does not strictly adhere to best practice in relation to high-stakes testing and formative assessment.
4.5 Conclusions

This chapter investigated and discussed the ways in which John Gregory embodied best practice in his mentorship role in the novel *The Spook’s Apprentice*. While taciturn by nature, John Gregory is a genuinely caring teacher who develops a strong relationship with his apprentice. He is revealed as a highly knowledgeable and respected man, though he remains humble and seeks out opportunities for lifelong learning. He discusses moral and ethical issues with his apprentice and emphasizes critical thinking skills. Though he has a tendency, due to the nature of his profession, to be disorganized or linear in his instruction he takes care to generate meaningful and productive learning experiences that are fast-paced and hands-on in nature. Despite the high-stakes nature of his assessment practices, John Gregory seeks to aid and encourage Tom’s progress, allowing the boy to self-assess and providing him with constant positive feedback. The Spook’s adherence to these optimal practices helps to promote and ensure Tom’s success.

In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which Halt follows best practice in his relationship with his apprentice Will in *The Ranger's Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan*. 
CHAPTER 5: The Ranger’s Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan

Using the lens of best practice, I now turn my attention to The Ranger’s Apprentice series by John Flanagan that follows Will, a teenage orphan ward of Castle Redmont in the kingdom of Araluen. Although small for his age, Will dreams of becoming a great knight. However, he is rejected as an apprentice to Castle Redmont’s Battleschool and instead is chosen as an apprentice to Halt, a mysterious Ranger with an uncanny ability to move about unseen. Will learns that Rangers are the kingdom’s intelligence force, skilled in archery, unseen movement, tracking, and law keeping. As rumour of impending war spreads through the kingdom, Will must quickly learn the skills of his craft and accompany his master on a number of perilous undertakings.

5.1 The Teacher as an Individual

At first, Halt does little to endear himself to Will as a caring, enthusiastic educator. At the first meeting between the two, Will is both nervous and disappointed to be assigned as an apprentice to the Ranger:

He knew nothing about Halt – apart from the fact that the grim, gray-cloaked figure had made him feel nervous whenever he was around. Now, it seemed, he was being assigned to spend all his time with him. And he wasn’t sure that he liked the idea at all. (42)

Rather than helping his student feel welcome and valued, Halt seems to enjoy his apprentice’s unease. He engages in little conversation with the boy, other than sarcastic questioning such as, “finished staring?” “got a cold, boy?” (49). And, throughout the novel, Halt is frequently described as grim, taciturn, and impassive (41, 45, 190). Will observes that his mentor “never smiles” (103).
Despite the rocky start to their relationship, Halt and Will begin to warm to one another. One of the first signs of their developing relationship emerges when Horace (an orphan raised with Will and apprenticed to Redmont Battleschool) ridicules Will’s training. Will is quick to defend his horse, his cloak, and the Ranger tradition (116). Halt, in turn, begins to speak less sarcastically to his student, and to address him with more respect:

One of the changes that had come over their relationship lately was the fact that Halt almost never referred to him as “boy” anymore. These days, it was almost always “Will”. Will liked that. It made him feel that somehow he’d been accepted by the grim-faced Ranger. (123)

As their training progresses, Halt becomes protective and almost fatherly. When Will participates in a wild boar hunt and is shaken by the experience, Halt “hurl[s] himself to the ground, throwing his arms around the shaking boy” (144). In a testimony to their newfound intimacy, Will buries his face and his tears of relief in his master’s cloak.

Halt’s ability to form lasting, caring relationships with his pupils is further demonstrated when they encounter Gilan, Halt’s former apprentice. The two men “embrace… each other warmly” (174) and share both compliments and jokes at each other’s expense. Will comes to learn that, although Halt has a grim and gruff exterior, the Ranger is deeply concerned with the well-being of those in his care. Will comes to realize that he is being accepted by both Halt and Gilan as part of the community of Rangers:

As they continued in companionable silence, Will became aware of the comforting realization that he was now part of an exclusive, tightly knit group. It
was a warm sense of belonging, as if, somehow, he had arrived home for the first time in his life. (176).

In addition to cultivating a caring relationship with Will, Halt clearly believes in the importance of the Ranger job and in his own ability to teach. He explains to Will that all aspects of Ranger training are vital, not just the elements that Will feels are exciting. When Will complains about chart- and mapmaking, Halt rebuts, “‘you’ll find these skills would become a little more important if you were planning a route for a company of heavy cavalry and forgot to mention that there’s a stream in the way’” (71).

Though Will is disappointed about the lack of sword fighting in Ranger work, Halt reassures his pupil about the strength of his weapons (bow and arrow) and the benefit of his repeated practice sessions (72-75). Baron Arald (Baron of Redmont and senior advisor to the King) also believes strongly in Halt’s position and educational program: He tells Will, “you’re learning a very important job there” (71). To his own surprise, Will finds himself agreeing with the Baron. The final proof of Halt’s confidence in his instruction and abilities as a teacher comes when Halt selects his two assistants, Gilan and Will, for his pursuit of the Kalkara (terrifying creatures used as assassins by Morgarath an enemy of Redmont). Halt is clearly confident that he has trained his apprentices well.

Excellent teachers have high expectations. There can be no doubt that Halt has high standards; in fact, Will sometimes feels he is struggling to impress his master. For example, during one particular archery practice, the Ranger sets an especially challenging criterion: “too add to the difficulty, Halt had stipulated that he should let no more than five seconds elapse between each shot” (152). Halt also expects much of his apprentice
in terms of honour and integrity. When Will recounts his own theft from Master Chubb the cook, Halt makes it clear that had the boy lied, Halt would not have chosen him as an apprentice. Halt’s training regime is clearly both intense and exacting, but produces Rangers of high quality.

Will’s master consistently places his apprentice first in learning considerations. First, Halt does not take an apprentice merely for extra help with the housework. Will reports that Halt rarely takes on apprentices, and Halt later reveals that he has watched and chosen Will specifically. And even when busy with his duties to the kingdom, Halt ensures that Will continues with meaningful learning tasks: “Halt had set the exercise for [Will] before he had gone to the Baron’s office to discuss a dispatch” (153). At the end of the novel, Halt explains to Will that the boy must chose the Ranger path on his own, regardless of the opinion of his master. When Will has the option to join battleschool and asks Halt’s opinion, the Ranger replies, “my feelings, my wishes, aren’t important in this. The right decision for you is the one you want most” (244) While Halt has come to appreciate both Will’s skill and his company, he shows himself to be a strong educator by placing his student’s needs and preferences ahead of his own.

In terms of morality, Halt sets an inconsistent example. While it is clear that he has devoted his life to the service of others, often placing himself in danger in order to assist the common people of Araluen, Will notices that Halt is a questionable advocate for social justice. Horace has been repeatedly bullied in battleschool, and the bullies then turn on Will. When Halt arrives on the scene, he does not break up the fight, but rather ensures that Horace and Will have the opportunity to hurt their former oppressors. Halt forces the bullies to participate in the “fair” fight, though they are “sobbing with pain and
fear” (158). On the one hand, Halt is facilitating a form of justice by giving the younger boys a chance to repay the injury they have endured. On the other hand, Halt’s “eye for an eye” approach, though satisfying for both victims and readers, does not set a tone of transcendence, reconciliation, and problem solving. However, despite his possibly controversial methods, Halt is regarded highly by his superiors, for example, Baron Arald tells Will, “just listen to Halt and do as he does and I’m sure you’ll have an honorable life ahead of you” (111).

Halt is unquestionably a master of exceptional knowledge and ability in his field. His skills in unseen movement leave Will in awe:

> He had been sure there was no one else in the room…. The Ranger could wrap himself in that strange, mottled, gray-green cloak of his and seem to melt into the background, blending into the shadows until he was invisible. (37)

Will also observes that Halt has “a sense of power and whipcord strength about him” (49), and notes that his master’s “powers of observation [are] uncanny” (127). Because of these attributes, most people in the castle, including the Baron, hold Halt in high esteem (44, 111). His apprentice discovers that Halt was almost single-handedly responsible for the defeat of Morgorath’s rebellion (110), and that even other Rangers look up to Halt (187). Will learns that Halt has a reputation for heroism throughout the kingdom, and that common folk have elevated Halt to a place of legend. Though it is humourous to the boy when the old farmer Salt Peter exclaims, “Why, the Ranger Halt is as tall as two men—and as broad… A giant of a man, he is! Brave, fierce in battle, he is” (131), the comment demonstrates the breadth of Halt’s mythical status. Far from resting on his laurels, the Ranger continues to put himself in positions of danger throughout the
book, most notably in the wild boar hunt and the search for the Kalkara. Will quickly becomes one of Halt’s admirers as he realizes that his master is truly a genius in his field.

### 5.2 Curriculum

Though Halt has some freedom in what he chooses to teach, he is restricted by the set of skills an apprentice Ranger is expected to learn. In general, Halt needs to ensure that Will is proficient in tracking and wilderness survival, unseen movement, general law, and a variety of weapons. Within this scope, Halt endeavors to foster higher-level thinking skills and critical problem solving. Though Will is assigned mundane tasks and, at first seemingly endless practice he soon learns that Halt is teaching him to think and reason. For example, Will is sometimes prone to impulsivity. On one such occasion, the boy asks if he can begin using his bow and arrow without instruction, Halt replies, “if you feel that’s a good idea, go ahead” (73, 99). Will’s attempt results in injury. Halt then explains to his apprentice the error in haste. Through allowing Will to learn through experience, Halt attempts to scaffold the boy’s reasoning and higher-level thinking abilities. Thus, while repetitive drills are one aspect of Halt’s lessons, he does strive to encourage more complex thought.

Best practice includes technology instruction and integration. The setting of *The Ranger’s Apprentice* is not conducive to the inclusion of modern technology. However, every setting, whether historical or fantastic in nature, features new equipment that aids in daily work. Halt introduces Will to a number of tools that are “cutting edge” for this setting. For example, he gives Will the mottled gray and green cloak characteristic of the Ranger Corps, and explains its camouflage function. In addition, he shows the boy two new and unfamiliar weapons: the recurve bow and Ranger’s knives. When Halt
introduces the bow, Will reports, “it was unlike any bow that [he] had seen before” (72).

Halt has brought the technology back from his time among the Temujai, a fierce group of fighting men from the east. He has also incorporated the Saxe knife design from the northern Skandian countries into the construction and use of the Ranger knives. Halt teaches Will the benefits of both weapons’ design in combat, and together they practice the use of the tools. By integrating new and unknown technology into his lessons, Halt enriches his training program and Will’s skills.

A best practice curriculum should include moral and ethical development, and awareness of social justice issues. As noted in the earlier discussion, Halt is often inconsistent in the moral example he sets. However, while inconsistent in his actions, Halt often emphasizes ethics and social justice in his teaching. He discloses to Will that the boy’s honesty about his kitchen theft was one criteria for being chosen to learn the art of being a Ranger, saying, “if you’d lied, you never would have become my apprentice” (62). He also coaches Will in the importance of modesty and acknowledging the attributes of others: “once you best a man, never gloat. Be generous and find something in his actions to praise” (173). Will follows these instructions, and as a result, Gilan takes a liking to him and comments on his “excellent manners” (174). In addition, Halt endeavors to teach Will that social standing does not equate with worth. Though Will is focused on battleschool and the glory of knighthood, Halt cautions, “don’t judge a man’s quality by his position in life, Will” (246). In these examples, Halt’s lessons and advice nurture morality and a sense of fairness in Will that others recognize and applaud.

Halt demonstrates outstanding instruction in the area of relevant and practical learning outcomes. His lessons are based around real-world tasks that Will needs to learn
to complete on his own. Halt teaches his apprentice how to cook (56), how to saddle and ride a horse (98), how to sense the watching eyes of others (127) and how to hunt wild boar as a strategic team member (134). The relevancy of these lessons is apparent throughout the novel. When Will and Horace have an altercation, the apprentice Ranger is prepared, both physically and mentally. Will’s arms are now “hard and well muscled after his three month’s training with Halt” (118) and he realizes, “his training with Halt has heightened his reasoning and his observation” (124). As a result, Will is no longer scared of fighting Horace, a much larger boy who has intimidated him for years. He now feels he can face Horace “with a certain amount of equanimity” (121).

Will recalls his practical lessons with Halt on numerous occasions, always crediting his effective training as he carries out procedures taught by the master Ranger. He recalls before fighting, “always strike first, Halt had dinned into his brain in the hours they’d spent practicing unarmed combat” (119). When looking for a place to keep watch, he carefully chooses his location away from camp, “one of the many skills Will had learned in his months of training” (194). While scouting, Will ensures his head and eyes scan “from side to side as Halt had taught him” (194). Though Will is not always aware of the extent and relevancy of his learning, he has developed exceptional skills and is now an expert in some areas: “there were already few archers in the kingdom, outside of the ranger corps, who could have matched him. Even the archers in the King’s army weren’t trained to shoot with such individual speed and accuracy” (154). Baron Arald recognizes Will’s arsenal of real-world abilities, and asks the boy’s for help and advice when he wonders why the Kalkara are so susceptible to fire (217, 222). Through Halt’s
carefully chosen learning objectives, Will has learned a curriculum that is practical and directly pertinent to his role.

While Halt is generally aware of Will’s interests, he trusts his own expertise as a teacher when planning his instruction. He has a number of learning objectives that he prioritizes: Ranger history, unseen movement, tracking, forest survival, weapon use, and mapmaking. Will enjoys some aspects of his instruction and is disinterested in others. Will looks down upon “less exciting tasks like map reading and chart drawing” (71), however, Halt insists the boy become an expert on all subjects. When Baron Arald asks Will if he is enjoying himself, the boy reflects that “he ha[sn’t] had time to think if he was enjoying himself or not. His days were too busy learning new skills, practicing with bow and knives and working with Tug” (109). In keeping with research about best practice, Halt finds that Will is more successful in areas that interest him. The master Ranger notes this and is generally impressed with his apprentice’s skill:

Will was a good student in the art of unseen movement, as Halt had already remarked, but he had a lot to learn before he reached ranger standard. Still, Halt was pleased with his progress. The boy was keen to learn – particularly when it was a matter of field craft like this. (71)

Though Halt is aware of Will’s preferences and observes a correlation between Will’s interests and his progress, he does not design lessons or choose learning outcomes based on these findings.

5.3 Instructional Practices

Halt seems to be organized and well prepared in his instruction. He has mentored apprentices before, and has a clear idea of what he wants to teach. He is also aware
throughout his instruction of the timeline necessary for Will’s learning, as the boy is to be assessed at the Ranger Gathering. Halt’s planning is not explicitly stated in the novel, but clues about his organization surface through Will’s recounting of events. For example, when Will and Halt visit Old Bob to meet a horse chosen for the boy, Will realizes that the horses normally live with the older Ranger and that Halt had strategically planned the time to introduce Will to his horse Tug: “the Ranger had only been waiting until Will had shown his ability to ride and to bond with Tug before reclaiming him from his temporary home in Old Bob’s stable” (103).

In addition, Halt seems to follow a scope and sequence in his instruction, beginning with difficult housework to evaluate the boy’s suitability and work ethic, then moving to lecture and direct instruction, followed by weapon skills and independent practice.

Halt incorporates mini-lessons throughout the day. When travelling, the Ranger is constantly teaching: “they’d walked for about half an hour, with the Ranger showing Will how to glide from one patch of shade to the next, as silently as possible” (71). Even while on horseback, Will notes, “as they rode… Halt had been pointing to disturbances in the even white cover” (122). Will becomes aware of the benefit of Halt’s ongoing instruction, and recognizes the immersive nature of his apprenticeship: “These days, Halt never missed an opportunity to teach him or question him or test his knowledge and developing skills” (129).

Halt structures learning at a brisk and productive pace. The boy notices that his “lessons and training proceeded at an accelerated pace” (148), and laments, “the idea of a Saturday holiday was a long forgotten luxury to him” (148). When he sees Will worn out
and resting between chores, Halt comments “No time to be lolling around doing nothing” (103). Will is not even sure if his Master will give him the traditional day off on Harvest day, though Halt does acquiesce and grant him a holiday (106).

Though his instructional pace is challenging, Halt is careful to scaffold learning and provide specific support so that Will is not overwhelmed. When Will is meeting his horse for the first time, Halt encourages him with strategies for success, saying, “don’t look at him… just take the rope and walk away from him. He’ll follow” (98). When Will follows his master’s advice, he accomplishes his task. Likewise, Halt ensures that his ward is safe during more demanding exercises. In the boar hunt, Halt places himself in the area of danger and takes care to position Will in an area of typical safety. The Ranger takes first watch in order to let Will sleep (193), and sends him away from danger during their pursuit of the Kalkara. In fact, Halt confesses to Gilan that he wishes he could protect his apprentice even more: “in an ideal world, I wouldn’t put him at risk like this. But this isn’t an ideal world. Everyone’s going to have to play his part in this campaign, even boys like Will” (187). It becomes clear throughout the novel that Halt seeks to challenge his apprentice, but also consistently considers his safety and provides him with support.

In addition to having high expectations in his lesson pacing, Halt seeks to instill impeccable behaviour in his pupil. He expects the boy to report for duty at six o’clock every morning (46), and is himself up and ready for work at this early hour. When Will repetitively steals glances at his master when he is supposed to be working, Halt abruptly questions, “finished staring?” (49), reminding the boy of his manners. Halt chastises Will when the boy loses focus, saying, “No. All too often, you don’t see, because you don’t
maintain your concentration. You’ll have to work on that” (123). The Ranger makes it clear that Will must live up to his exacting standards if he is to train as a Ranger. At one point, Will angrily questions his master about the small Ranger horses, and Halt holds up his hand for silence. This interaction shows both Halt’s high behaviour expectations and Will’s quick compliance to his master’s cues. Will understands and respects Halt’s management techniques, as “he’d learned by now that Halt didn’t criticize without reason” (123).

Because Ranger training is a singular process, with one master and one pupil, Halt does not have much opportunity to engage Will in co-operative learning. That being said, the Ranger does make an effort to include the boy in group experiences when possible. For example, he brings Will to the boar chase, where the boy has the opportunity to work along side other apprentices as well as experienced knights. Halt expresses pride in the way Will interacts with Horace on this occasion (145). In accordance with best practice, Halt’s teaching focuses on hands-on learning. He begins Will’s tutelage with a barrage of housework and physical skills that will be necessary when Will lives on his own as a Ranger. Halt conducts lessons in the forest, where he has Will identify the forest creatures from their tracks. He shows the boy how to read his horse for signs of nearby dangers (124). When Will is unsure of how to manage his new horse, Halt encourages him through hands-on learning, saying, “you’re fast on your feet. Turn him loose and see if you can capture him again” (88). By using real experiences, Halt ensures that his apprentice will be confident when faced with real challenges in the future. At one point, Will looks back on his training time and reflects on his engagement and industry:
Those three months had been a time of constant practice with his bow and the knives that Halt had given him. Three months of stalking through the fields outside the castle, moving from one scant patch of cover to the next, trying to make his way unobserved by Halt’s eagle eyes. Three months of riding and caring for Tug, of forming a special bond of friendship with the little pony. (107)

These examples show that Halt designs and implements lessons with a focus on active, hands-on learning.

Best practices in teaching underscore that an effective teacher must encourage questioning and reflective thinking in order to advance curiosity and higher-level thinking skills. During the beginning of his time with Will, Halt seems generally annoyed by the questions of his apprentice. He repeatedly stifles Will’s queries, saying, “stop asking so many questions” (73), “why does this boy ask so many questions?” (85), and “what now?” (105). Will is affected by his master’s obvious exasperation, and becomes timid about asking for clarification during lessons: “Will was aching to ask more questions. But he’d learned by now that Halt wasn’t going to answer them, so he held his tongue and bided his time” (85). This is not an ideal learning environment, as Will feels criticized instead of celebrated for his curiosity. Halt does eventually acquiesce and answer some of Will’s incessant questions. Will is surprised when the Ranger eventually admits, “Curious, are you? ... Well, I suppose that’s a good trait for a Ranger’s apprentice” (53). In subsequent lessons, Halt answers Will’s questions about Lord Northolt (53), about the functioning of the Ranger Corps (59), and about Morgorath (180). In these instances, Halt displays both patience and attention to detail when addressing his pupil’s curiosity. The Ranger also utilizes open-ended questioning during
his lessons, both to analyze background knowledge and to encourage Will’s thinking. When the boy meets his horse, Halt asks, “what do you think of him?” (88), and when Will identifies an animal track, Halt prompts, “so… rabbits. Is that all?” (123). Will eventually learns to gauge Halt’s willingness to share (or not) in discussion: “‘Halt?’ he said experimentally, not sure if Halt would order him to silence. The ranger looked at him, eyebrows raised in a sign that he was prepared to answer questions” (197). Though Halt does not consistently create an open forum for questions and discussions, Will is eventually able to navigate his master’s moods.

5.4 Assessment

Though best practice teaching should avoid singular, high-stakes testing, an apprenticeship to the Ranger Corps includes a cumulative year-end examination that determines a boy’s ability to continue. Will explains,

It was also the time when apprentices were assessed, to see if they were fit to progress to the next year of training. It was bad luck for Will that he had been in training for only seven months. If he didn’t pass the assessment at this year’s gathering, he would have to wait another year, until the next opportunity arose. As a result, he practiced and practiced from dawn till dusk each day. (148)

Will clearly feels anxiety about this upcoming test, which is in keeping with best practice research findings. While Halt is not necessarily responsible for implementing this test, he is a well-respected and senior member of the Ranger Corps, and by implication, condones the tradition of Ranger examinations.

Generally, Will is aware of when he is being evaluated, and of the criteria he must fulfill. Even with the less-than-ideal yearly examination, the boy knows the areas in
which he will be tested and the standards he must meet. Halt effectively mentors Will toward success in this test, ensuring the boy is aware of what to expect: “for the past two nights, Halt’s soft voice had given Will advice and instructions on how to conduct himself at the gathering” (168). In earlier lessons, Halt explains what he is looking for in a pupil, so that Will is able to work towards these criteria. When Will wildly guesses an answer to Halt’s questions, the Ranger advises, “Boy, if you don’t know something, don’t try to bluff your way through it. Simply tell me ‘I don’t know,’ is that clear?” (57). Will keeps this in mind during later questioning, as he is now aware that he is being evaluated for humility and honesty, not just knowledge. During a later lesson, Will considers his previous criteria and takes his time when answering his master: “He knew it was best to consider carefully before making an answer. Halt preferred accurate replies, not fast ones” (129). There are times, however, when Halt is not as transparent in his assessment practices. For example, Will is not immediately chosen as Halt’s apprentice. Rather, in Will’s presence, Halt writes his decision on a piece of paper and leaves it on the desk of Baron Arald. Curious as to the content of the paper, Will climbs the Baron’s tower unaware that the paper he is seeking has been placed in the tower as a test of his curiosity and his climbing ability. He is shocked when he finds out that the situation was contrived as a test:

“That’s why we tested you with that paper in the Baron’s office.”

“You tested me?” Will set the heavy kettle down by the door. “You expected me to try to see what it said?”

Halt nodded. “Would have been disappointed if you hadn’t. Also, I wanted to see how you’d go about it.” (53)
Because Will was not aware he was being evaluated, he feels both betrayed and embarrassed by Halt. The Ranger may have had his reasons for secrecy in this assessment, but he nonetheless shows inconsistency in the clarity of his evaluative practices.

Effective teachers provide frequent, constructive, and consistent feedback. Halt supplies feedback often, though it is sometimes rather severe in nature. When Will arrives at his teacher’s door for his first day of instruction, Halt comments, “at least you’re on time” (48). While Will toils away at the housework, Halt interjects, “you’ve missed a bit on the left side”, and “put some energy into it, boy” (51). Old Bob is scandalized when Halt says Will rides “not too badly”, and admonishes the Ranger, “Not too badly? You’re a hard man, Ranger! Youngster sat him light as a feather through that jump!” (102). As the novel progresses, Halt becomes more positive and specific in his feedback. Not only is he complimentary, he tells Will precisely what the boy is doing right. When observing his stealthy movement, Halt tells Will, “you already have some of the skills required… you used the shadows and the movement of the wind to conceal yourself” (59). He is occasionally generous with his compliments, as when he explains Will’s emerging Ranger skills: “You’re agile. That’s good in a Ranger…. And, as we’ve discussed, you can move quietly. That’s very important. You’re fast on your feet. And you’re inquisitive…” (62). Will thrives on this feedback, and seeks to continue to improve his skills. During archery lessons, Halt gives positive feedback such as, “That’s better… Try to use your back muscles, not just your arms” (74), and “Not bad at all… your shooting is definitely improving” (85). Halt also conveys his feedback through non-verbal means. When he nods his approval at Will after the boy mounts Tug, Will
understands the gravity of the gesture. Later, after Will’s bravery in the boar hunt, he comments on his master’s reaction: “Halt, for his part, said nothing. But when Will turned to look at his mentor, the grizzled Ranger met his eye, and simply nodded. And that, Will knew, was the equivalent of three hearty cheers from Halt” (145). Will has come to understand and appreciate the nature of his master’s feedback, though this feedback is not always positive or exuberant in nature.

In the course of his instruction, Halt does provide opportunities for Will to be involved in his own evaluation. Halt insists that Will constantly practice his shooting and compare his skills with Halt’s high standards. The boy is eventually content with his progress: “Will… stopped to survey the results. He nodded in satisfaction. Every arrow had hit a target” (153). By encouraging Will to assess his own results, Halt ensures that the boy is wholly invested in his own learning process. Later in the novel, Will is given the change to enroll in battleschool. This is a pivotal decision, as Will must measure his own skills, progress, and affinity for the Ranger Corps against his childhood dream to become a knight. Halt makes it clear that this analysis, and this decision, must come from the boy himself. Baron Arald tells Will, “[Halt] insisted that this is up to you…he’s already agreed to abide by your decision” (241). Halt arranges chances for Will to self-assess in both formative and summative settings.

Halt structures his instruction around information gained from ongoing assessment. Before learning about Rangers, Will must prove his physical ability and dedication through completion of household chores. At times, Will shows that he is unable to complete a task. Halt then alters his instruction in order to teach and solidify these skills. For example, Will reveals he has never learned to cook, and Halt responds,
“Of course you can’t. Most boys can’t. So I’ll have to show you how. Come on” (56), and then follows with a detailed co-operative lesson. When the boy meets Tug, he realizes the Ranger has “been waiting until Will had shown his ability to ride and to bond with Tug” (103), before allowing his apprentice to bring the horse home permanently. Halt allows his apprentice to accompany him on the search for the Kalkara, but only because the boy has proven himself in unseen movement, tracking, and archery. Each step of Halt’s instruction proceeds only after Will successfully completes his previous skills.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated and discussed the way in which Halt embodied best practice in his mentorship role in the novel *The Ranger's Apprentice*. By nature, Halt is a reserved character but over the course of the novel he reveals himself as a gifted teacher who displays many principles of best practice in his teaching. He is a caring educator who believes in the efficacy of his teaching and is a celebrated genius in his field. He fosters independent critical thinking in his lessons, incorporates available technology, and focuses on relevant and practical learning outcomes. Halt’s lessons are organized, challenging, well-scaffolded, and hands-on in nature. He coaches his pupil towards success during assessment, encourages self-evaluation, and provides effective feedback. Halt proves himself as an educator whose use of best practice promotes success for his apprentice.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss the findings in terms of my original questions and implications for further research.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to examine two novels through the lens of best practice teaching. Both The Last Apprentice and The Ranger’s Apprentice are the first novels in a historical fiction/fantasy series. Both are incredibly popular and widely published in the international market, and have arrangements for feature film versions. Both are aimed at 11-14 year old readers and feature male protagonists near this same age. These books were chosen because of their widespread popularity and influence on modern young adult readers. Researchers agree that messages gleaned from books influence children’s concept of self, others, and society in general. As these two novels are both concerned with education through the apprentice-master modality, they present messages about teaching and instruction. By examining current best practice research and comparing it to the teaching in the novels, I was then able to analyze the quality of teaching presented in each book.

6.1 Conclusions from the Research

There is a well-documented timeline of apprenticeships as the foremost model of education from the beginning of written history until the 19th century. Ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Romans, as well as Medieval Europeans and North American colonialists, learned through apprentice-master relationships both formal and informal. Novels focusing on apprentice-master relationships are abundant in children’s and YA literature.

However, little scholarship exists that addresses or analyses this genre. In addition, little scholarship exists that examines the quality of teaching in novels in
general. Most studies about schools and teaching in children’s literature have found overarching themes of negativity towards school and teachers. Because children identify strongly with students (and apprentices) in books, authors and educators need to consider the messages conveyed in novels, and whether or not a productive or meaningful representation of teaching exists in these novels.

Current best practice research can be divided into four areas: the instructor as an individual, curricular scope, instructional practice, and assessment. Effective teachers are confident and positive. They believe in education and have high expectations of their students. They seek to develop caring relationships with their students and to be educated experts in their field. In terms of curriculum, best practice emphasizes practical and relevant learning outcomes, student choice, higher-level thinking and problem solving, technology integration, and promotion of social justice. Learning experiences should be well-planned, fast paced, and hands-on in nature in order to maximize learning. In addition, educators should consider a variety of teaching methods and foster curiosity and effective questioning. Finally, best practice research appeals for ongoing assessment in which the student is aware of criteria and expectations. Student self-assessment and informative teacher feedback is also critical for optimal learning. A best practice teacher effectively balances each of these four areas in order to promote student success.

6.2 Summary of Textual Findings

Both John Gregory and Halt start off as rather grim masters, and their apprentices are nervous about their learning situations. However, both masters are genuinely kind men who care deeply for their apprentices and for the well-being of
other citizens. John Gregory and Halt can both be said to set an occasionally inconsistent moral standard, but are generally honourable, ethical, and well-respected. Both boys are initially skeptical of their master’s exacting standards but come to respect their intentions and their decisions. Though both masters set high standards, Halt’s actions are more student-centered than those of John Gregory. The Ranger and the Spook are unquestionable experts and acknowledged leaders in their fields.

The masters in each novel have some curricular freedom, but must ensure their apprentices emerge competent in each skill related to their profession, as proficiency in each job can mean the difference between life and death. John Gregory and Halt both encourage independence, critical thinking, and problem solving in their instruction. Both masters make good use of available technology for educational purposes; for example, Halt effectively incorporates international weaponry into his lessons. The two masters share a particular area of strength: their lessons are unvaryingly practical and relevant in nature.

Both men are experienced teachers with organized, carefully planned instructional tools. They teach at a brisk pace which sometimes threatens to overwhelm their students, however, both boys are stimulated by the challenge and show excellence in their studies. Both masters can appear impatient with their pupil’s behaviour. Neither teacher is able to facilitate frequent co-operative learning, but they do excel at providing hands-on learning experiences with both mundane and complex tasks. Finally, the Spook appears stronger at fostering
questioning and curiosity in his pupil, though both masters demonstrate effective questioning skills in their instruction.

According to current best practice, neither master’s use of assessment is ideal. Will is subject to a singular, cumulative final test, and Tom is frequently exposed to high-stakes evaluations. However, both masters incorporate ongoing assessment into their lessons and usually seek to communicate goals, criteria, and expectations to their apprentices. Halt and John Gregory do excel in providing opportunities for student self-assessment, and provide timely and specific feedback to their apprentices. Both of these strengths allow the boys to consistently improve and grow throughout their apprenticeships.

Overall, according to best practices research, the masters in *The Last Apprentice* and *The Ranger’s Apprentice* are written as competent and effective educators. Although each mentor has particular areas upon which he could improve, they are depicted as caring, competent, and thoughtful mentors/teachers and, as a direct result of their master’s instruction, both Tom and Will are highly successful, engaged apprentices/students.

6.3 Implications for Future Research

This study focused specifically on novels concerning apprenticeship, however, the framework of best practice used here could also be applied to novels portraying modern teaching.

I chose the two novels in this study due to their popularity and current influence, as well as their depictions of historically typical apprenticeships. Unfortunately, this did not allow me to examine apprenticeship novels featuring
female masters or students. Considering the general lack of historical information about young girls, in comparison to young boys, this would be a valuable topic for further study. Though female apprenticeships were more common in North America and not often documented, there are a number of quality novels that call attention to these young women.

Likewise, the close-reading limitations of this thesis prevented me from addressing apprenticeships from cultures other than Europe or North America. In addition, it did not seem consistent for the purpose of this study to analyze Asian apprenticeships, for example, through a Western best-practice lens. Further research could attend to novels depicting instruction in a variety of cultures, or use a best-practice lens incorporating the research of a variety of cultures.

Because the two novels in this study have recent publication dates and modern audiences, I used modern best-practice research to analyze the efficacy of instruction. A more complex study could develop various lenses of best practice over time, as outlined in section 1.1.1, and apply these lenses to books published at a comparable time. This study could then consider whether novels of a certain era depicted best practice teaching as defined at that time.

Finally, this study touched upon the importance of novels in communicating messages to the reader. Further research could identify readers’ responses to the teaching exhibited in children’s literature, and examine the perceived relationship between quality educators and successful students. Both educators and authors must be aware of how learning is depicted in literature, as the portrayal of teachers such as John Gregory and Halt can influence the readers’ concept of education.
References


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**Primary Texts**


