Being There as a Support, a Guide, and to Intervene When You Have To: Mentors Reflect on Working with Teacher Candidates

Lawrence J. Ruich
Indiana University-Perdue University ofColumbus

Thomas Browning
Wayne State College

Gretchen Butera
Indiana University

This paper presents a study that investigated how mentors perceived their long-term relationships with teacher candidates in a secondary teacher preparation program. The study describes the process by which the teacher candidates and the mentors select each other and how the relationship develops, with findings that suggest that the length of time teacher candidates and mentor teachers work together as essential to building trust. Mentors identify themselves as quasi-teacher educators who serve as an extension to the university preparation process. Findings explore the benefits of mentoring for the prospective and practicing teachers as well as to teacher preparation in general. To optimize the value of field experience, it is important to understand this relationship and its outcomes.

Keywords*: choice, mentor, field experience, teacher preparation*

Data from this mentor study underlines the essential role of field experience in teacher preparation, making a compelling case for the centrality of the mentor role in solidifying and deepening the teacher candidate's understanding and skills about the profession (Parker-Katz & Bay, 2007). The extensive set of interviews of mentor-teachers provides a glimpse into the ways mentors relate to and support teacher candidates in their efforts to become effective teachers. The length of time these individuals spend together helps develop this significant relationship. The researchers of the study illustrate the wisdom embodied in a policy that extends the mentor-teacher candidate relationship from beginning fieldwork through student teaching. It is common for the relationship to continue into induction.

In this study, we refer to practicing teachers who work with teacher candidates as mentors, signifying the role they play in preparing prospective teachers. The program is unique in that both parties select each other at the outset of a candidate's program. Consequently, the candidate will student teach in the classroom of their chosen mentor.

Literature Review

Researchers in teacher education identified the importance of field experience in teacher preparation. Through early experiences, teacher candidates have opportunities to engage in authentic learning (Caprano et al., 2010), increase knowledge while receiving the collaborative support of others (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006), work toward advancing the skills of students with individual needs (Hanline, 2010), and challenge what may be unchecked biases by working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017; Villegas, 2007). During field experiences, teacher candidates work in the classroom to try their hand at identifying suitable material, developing lessons, facilitating classroom procedures, and delivering instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lampert, 2010).

The impact of these field experiences does not diminish over time. Teachers describe early field experience and student teaching as the most beneficial, authentic, and practical aspects of their teacher education (Clarke et al., 2014). As researchers in teacher education continually informs us, learning to teach is a difficult, complex, demanding, and emotional journey (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020; Spalding et al., 2011). It occurs over time and is contextualized, unpredictable, often personal, and idiosyncratic (Lampert, 2010; Spalding et al., 2011). Field practicum experience and the relationship the candidate has with a practicing teacher influence how they understand what it means to become a teacher.

Teacher educators cannot assume that a candidate will emerge from field experience with knowledge about how to teach and interact with students in the classroom (Welsh & Schaffer, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). Despite the influence of practicing teachers, it is not always clear how or why experienced teachers assume their role with teacher candidates. Some scholars have found that teachers overseeing a teacher candidate view their role as mere "cooperation," seeming to believe they should do nothing more than provide a place for the teacher candidate to practice teaching (Clarke et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2008). Other times they take a more active role, assisting and supporting the teacher candidate as they learn to teach (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Jaspers et al., 2014). In these circumstances, practicing teachers provide examples meant for imitation (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996), solve problems (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005), and provide moral support as they talk with candidates about their attempts to learn to teach (Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005). Clark et al. (2014) detail the numerous and sometimes fragmented roles practicing teachers play as they offer feedback, model lessons,

develop relationships, and invite candidates to consider changes to their teaching approach. Kemmis et al. (2014) point out that the efforts of these practicing teachers serve various purposes including supervision, support, and professional development for the experienced teacher. They mention that many purposes occur within the relationship and that sometimes purposes conflict.

The relationship between teacher candidates and practicing teachers has evolved to become both collegial and collaborative. Ambrosetti (2014) notes that the relationship that develops between a candidate and a mentor becomes reciprocal as they work toward a common understanding. Care and concern for one another grows within the relationship and this mutuality extends beyond either individual's personal agenda (Clark et al., 2014). This reciprocal affiliation lessens the power differential often associated with supervisory models. The approach may significantly enhance the field experience for both partners, as the candidate offers newly acquired (theoretical) knowledge in teacher education while the mentor offers skill and the wisdom of experience (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). Candidates are encouraged to examine learning in the classroom; they acquire a variety of teaching strategies to respond to students' needs while emphasizing the importance of collaboration and reflective practice (Parker-Katz & Bay, 2008).

Relationships between practicing teachers and candidates may involve tensions (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008). Conflicting values may pull partners in two directions: one leaning toward established school culture, the other promoting expectations from the university. Practicing teachers report feeling conflicted about being a friend to the candidate in their classroom while also being a critic (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004). Further struggles arise when a candidate's preparation seems to interfere with the academic progress of students in the classroom (Jasper et al., 2014; Rhoads et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Situated Learning and Communities of Practice

In the teacher preparation program of this study, situated learning frames the relationships between teacher candidates and their mentors. Conceptualized by Lave and Wenger (1991), situated learning occurs as a candidate acquires instructional competence by engaging in the process of teaching. Playing the role of teacher eventually disappears as they begin to self-identify. Within the school environment, tensions need mediating due to factors such as internal beliefs (how things should go) versus external demands (how administrators want things to go).

The basis of a social theory of learning (Lave & Wenger 1991), a community of practice is a collection of people who engage in an ongoing basis in some common endeavor (e.g., teachers in a school setting). In the course of activity, this effort develops ways of doing things, views, values, power relations, and ways of talking (Eckert, 2006). Two conditions are central to its meaning: a shared experience over time and a commitment to a shared understanding. Such a foundation is central to the construction of a teacher as it outlines a common ground, allowing the development of cultural structures understood holistically (Eckert, 2006).

In a 'community of learners,' committed members participate in practice with other involved members (e.g., mentor-teacher candidate relationship) and construct shared interpretations that become generative. The intention is to transform the candidate into a teacher with an established identity. Both classroom practice and teacher development are stimulated through mutual interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The shared practice and discourse of the 'community of learners' develops a sustainable educational practice and personal and professional

development for both parties. The candidate takes on the responsibility for their own role in relation to that of others and to the totality of the school in which they participate (Parker-Katz & Bay, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

We sought to understand how the element of choice in pairing teacher candidates with mentors influence how they work together. We explore how mentors thought about field experiences and how they develop relationships with teacher candidates. Given the key role of relationship, we speculated that understanding the perspectives of mentors might also serve to inform other programs about how to support practicing teachers in their roles with teacher candidates. What follows is an examination of mentors' perspective about their work.

Three specific questions guided our investigation:

1. Why do mentor teachers agree to mentor teacher candidates?
2. How do mentors describe their relationship with teacher candidates?
3. How do mentors share teaching knowledge and skills in a long-term field experience?

Method

We employed a qualitative design to deepen our understanding of the experience of mentors working with candidates. The design serves to identify the essence of mentor experiences and understand relationships in context such as a school, or classroom (Creswell, 2013). As Polkinghorne (2005) outlines, comparing and contrasting the perspectives of various individuals permits the researcher to uncover essential characteristics across these sources. This phase of discovery involved an unpacking of core meanings through multiple interviews.

Community of Teachers (CoT)

Offered at a south central university in the Midwest, the Community of Teachers (CoT) program aims to cultivate a community of practice where prospective teachers gain teaching competencies and work toward a teaching license. Part of the program's mission encourages candidates and their mentors to set goals and solve teaching problems in the field, rather than perform a series of activities that relate to teaching competencies (Chapman & Flinders, 2006). There are three components of the program: the seminar setting, a culminating professional portfolio, and field experience.

Weekly seminars involve candidates at all stages of preparation, including undergraduate and graduate students, from beginners in the program to those about to graduate. Teacher candidates enroll in various secondary content areas licensed in the state, including language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, art and music education as well as special education. The seminar requirement replaces some professional education coursework (i.e., methods courses) required to complete a license in the state. In seminar, a faculty facilitator guides activities that focus on a semester theme chosen by candidates. Chosen topics explore educational theories, practice, and effective instructional strategies. Themes align with competencies mapped out in the program's portfolio assessment (e.g., curriculum development, teaching reading and writing, assessment). The facilitator also acts as an advisor and university supervisor for fieldwork observations including the candidate's student teaching.

Portfolio evidence compiled throughout the program may or may not involve mentors. Artifacts from a candidate's life experience, including informal teaching activities that occur in various community settings or in coursework at the university, are typically included in the portfolio. At the conclusion of student teaching, candidates earn a license by presenting the accumulated evidence to demonstrate an ability to teach.

As a field-based program, CoT assumes that the acquisition of pedagogical skill strengthens in intensive, long-term field experiences (Chapman & Flinders, 2006). Candidates who enter the program are required to visit several secondary schools to observe and choose a mentor by the end of their second semester. The program offers a list of mentors who have previously worked with the program, but encourages candidates to seek new ones. Once a partnership is established, the facilitator from the candidate's seminar meets with the pair to discuss the program's expectations. Faculty then visit the candidate in the mentor's classroom and discuss observations as well as address any issues of concern. Prior to student teaching, a candidate is required to spend two semesters in the mentor's classroom. The majority of candidates spend an average of four academic semesters before they student teach.

Participants

Thirteen mentors participated with given pseudonyms (see Table 1). Volunteers originated from a list of mentors currently active in CoT. They teach a variety of content areas in both general and special education settings. The complete investigation, procedures and instruments, gained approval from the Institutional Review Board's Human Subjects Committee.

Table 1
Demographic of Mentors in Secondary School Setting

Mentors	Years Teaching	Teacher Candidates*	Content	Institution
Nicole	28	>7	SpEd	Public: HS
Jenny	10	>5	SpEd/AS	Public: HS
Stanley	32	>10	English	Public: HS
Karl	30	>20	SpEd/Basic Skill	Public: HS
Carrie	30	2	Science	Public: HS
Charles	10	1	SpEd/Comm. Base	Public: HS
Rhonda	20	>10	SpEd	Public: HS
Susan	7	3	English	Public: HS
David	5	1	Science/Physics	Public: HS
Miranda	10	>5	English	Public: HS
Gene	10	3	English	Private: MS
Tom	10	3	Science	Public: MS
Richard	15	>5	English	Public: HS

Note. SpEd = Special Education; MS = Middle School; HS = High School.
*may include candidates outside of university's teacher preparation program.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provided an interpretive, naturalistic approach to collect perspectives on the phenomenon of mentor experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Open-ended interview questions yielded viewpoints about teaching, relationship building, shared knowledge, and the effects of a field experience partnership over an extended length of time between the mentor and teacher candidate. Six researchers conducted interviews in the mentor's classroom.

Data Analysis

We transcribed and complied recordings into individual data sets for analysis. Utilizing an inductive process, it required a reading and rereading of sets individually and in small groups. Notations based on interviews identified patterns and regularities originating in tentative themes. A working definition, including criteria emerged for each theme: an ongoing process throughout the study. Nine coded themes originated: length of field experience, relationships between mentor and teacher candidate, candidate need, benefits for mentors, school setting demands, reflection, reproducing the profession, disposition, and miscellaneous. The researchers collapsed coded themes into three categories: Passing it Along, Getting to Know Each Other, and Negotiating a Balance.

Based on the established categories, the authors suggest that mentors perceived their role to be complex and multi-faceted. Some mentors felt obligated to reproduce the profession and maintain the status quo whereas others sought to improve the field of education by exerting an influence on the next generation of teachers. They saw their role as both supportive and focused on relationship building. Mentoring allowed them to examine their own practice –offering insight on what works and what may need alterations. Concurrently, they also emphasized that there was a time and place for a supervisory role and they asserted themselves as needed, usually as a last resort.

Passing It Along

When asked why they agreed to take on the role of mentoring a teacher candidate, most explained that it was helpful to have an extra person in the classroom to assist them with the myriad of teaching tasks. Beyond these practical reasons, mentors acknowledged wanting to pass along their expertise by participating in the preparation of teachers. They also described enjoyable interactions with candidates, which allowed mentors to help them learn to teach.

Miranda, an English teacher who has mentored for more than five years, thought of mentoring a candidate as a way to help provide schools with "good teachers who would become colleagues." Like Miranda, most interviewed mentors reported wanting to help prepare future teachers by transmitting years of accumulated wisdom and to inspire them to carry on their teaching legacy. As Stanley, another English teacher put it:

> Just the chance to pass on tricks and skills and to think along with somebody else who is eager, that becomes really gratifying… because you're not an artist, so you can't turn it into a play or a movie… there's no way to preserve what you've done. So, [mentoring] becomes a way of preserving something.

Karl, a special education mentor, proposed visiting the university more often as a way to "pass along" what he has learned over the years. He also wanted to relay what he knew and felt

his perspective as an experienced teacher was important to convey.

> One of the things I enjoyed was coming out [to a university seminar discussion] a couple times personally. I think there's so many people within 30 miles of [the university] that maybe the teacher candidates could bounce questions off of… me and one another to get ideas. [Candidates] can get real life, non-sugar coated answers to how things are heading [in public schools].

Mentors emphasized that over time they realized that they too were benefitting from the relationship with the teacher candidate in their classroom. Susan, an English teacher, explained how this mutuality developed since she "learned so much from her [teacher candidate]. Oh my gosh, so much." Susan recollected how she met the teacher candidate, explaining:

> I think she was talking to another English teacher. I came moseying into his room for some reason or another. We got to talking about how we did something, maybe literary analysis... I asked her if she wanted to come and observe me and she said yes. I guess she liked what she saw. She kept coming, then asked if I would be her mentor. It felt great.

Mentors often spoke of feeling flattered when chosen. Like Susan, Nicole, a veteran special education teacher said she felt honored and that the experience benefitted her practice. Over her twenty-eight years teaching, she had many teacher candidates come "in and out." She appreciated the depth of the "give and take" experience of CoT and explained that she had learned from them as much as she taught them. "[S]ometimes it's humbling and sometimes it pumps me up, revitalizes me," she said. Similarly, Stanley explained that "even after thirty-two years of teaching English," he enjoyed the "collaboration and problem solving" that occurred with CoT teacher candidates. For Karl, the relationship let him reflect upon his own practice:

> I think [teaching] just becomes intuitive at some point in time, you know? And maybe that's not always good. We need to find a new way to be reflective. And hosting a student teacher is really the only way we get to say, 'Hey, I'm going to watch someone else do my job.' That doesn't happen otherwise.

Like Stanley, Miranda valued the reciprocal nature of the relationship. She noted that watching the teacher candidate work with students provided her with opportunities "to see things that worked, as well as things that were less successful." She noted that mentoring provided her with an opportunity to "question whether [her] ways of approaching various problems in teaching were always the best." Nicole also reflected about what she learned from mentoring teacher candidates, pointing out that they brought new ideas to her by describing what was read and discussed in their coursework. She frequently asked the candidate to tell her more about course assignments and requirements.

Charles, a first-time mentor who was also a veteran special education teacher, considered his own "professional development" in an interview:

> Yeah, it made me reflect more…If I can't justify why we are doing something, then maybe it is something we shouldn't do…When Adam [the teacher candidate] was leading and doing things similar to the way I would do it, I was able to step back to see if it was working… and then ask, "Is it the right thing?" It would give me insights.

Getting to Know Each Other

Mentors working closely with a candidate built a relationship that they both enjoyed personally and benefited from professionally. Stanley reported that he knew that he would enjoy working with the candidate right away.

I really liked [Terry], and a colleague of mine did too. The very first day Terry was here, I just let him talk to the kids… There's a student support group in the school and the sponsor walked into the classroom and Terry immediately gravitated towards the program, saying he wanted to be part of it. He's wonderful.

According to the mentors, being able to choose one another rather than having a placement arranged by the university seemed to facilitate their relationship. This was evident when the opportunity to choose was not available or when they felt compelled to oversee the development of a candidate in their classroom.

In his interview, David, a science teacher, explained that his principal asked him to take over mentoring a teacher candidate after the retirement of a physics teacher. Reflecting on the experience, David described feeling uncertain. He felt that the candidate, "was groomed to…accept what the model of good teaching looked like" and the school administration appreciated what Lance, the teacher candidate had to offer the school." Unfortunately, the model of teaching the school administration favored was not especially compatible with David's practices and this created tension throughout their relationship.

Miranda had initial reservations about taking on a teacher candidate in her English class. The candidate who visited her classroom was originally from the island of Taiwan and English was her second language. Miranda had concerns about how accepting the students in the classroom would be since there was "very little diversity at this school," and the potential "barriers" related to language and culture seemed evident. Shu-chen, the teacher candidate persisted in visiting and observing the classroom despite Miranda's reservations, which shifted from a concern with cultural "acceptance of someone not from America" to "a willingness to advance the field of teaching." Over time, Miranda's worry lessened, evident initially when she asked Shu-chen to present a lesson about education in Taiwan. The lesson was well received and Shu-chen ended up teaching the students phrases in Mandarin. Surprised and pleased, Miranda felt that the experience brought her students closer to Shu-chen, giving them insight about how difficult it might be to acquire a second language and to navigate unfamiliar cultural practices.

When discussing a traditional short-term practicum experience he had experienced, Karl was emphatic with his position. "I know I sent one packing because I wasn't about to turn my classroom over to somebody who told me she was getting her 'M.R.S. degree…What I've come to love about CoT is I really get to know the teacher candidate. They're in my room for a long time, they really get the flavor, they get an idea of the program, and the kids."

Most mentors mentioned "being good with kids" as essential in building the relationship with teacher candidates. Charles explained he enjoyed having Adam in his room because Adam actively reached out to students. "[T]he very first day he was here, Adam was interacting with the students. That doesn't always happen." Comparing Adam's presence in the classroom with others from another preparation program, Charles reflected, "many just feel comfortable sitting back and being the observer at first, Adam was never an observer. He immediately initiated conversations with students." Adam's efforts to get to know the students led Charles to see him as "somebody I can trust in my room."

Other mentors expressed appreciation for the way candidates fostered connections with students, often noting that the long-term placement supported these relationships. Carrie, a veteran science teacher described the teacher candidate in her classroom this way:

She wasn't waiting for me to give her the answer. She was going to go out there and find the answer. And I think that started when she first started watching my class. She was wanting to be engaged, but she didn't want to cross the line, she wanted to make sure that

I was comfortable with it. She would ask permission, "Can I go around to potentially help groups?" Her overall willingness to want to be active was essential to how we got along.

On occasion, mentors lamented that teacher candidates did not make the most of their time and missed opportunities to establish meaningful relationships. Jenny, a special education teacher, was dismayed with a teacher candidate whose attendance was inconsistent. Jenny explained that her classroom included "a variety of learners with diverse needs." The realization that the teacher candidate "could not be counted on to attend regularly and to be on time" immediately became an issue. She explained that consistency was essential, especially given the student population in her classroom. Jenny thought the teacher candidate's intermittent attendance interfered with student learning and elevated their anxiety. She also mentioned that the teacher candidate's engagement with the students was limited and "she often seemed distant and disinterested in my room." These behaviors portrayed someone who "was unapproachable and the students seemed wary of her. Her time in my room did not last long."

As mentors and teacher candidates became acquainted with one another, mentors encouraged initiative as they negotiated the relationship with their teacher candidate. Both individuals learned to collaborate with each other to the benefit of the classroom environment. Mentors seemed to realize that achieving a balance was critical to the professional growth of the teacher candidate as well as their own. As Gene described:

I think my goal is by the end we can go have a beer, talk about teaching. I don't know if that has to be at the end, but by the end we are talking the same language and I think you reward that by just being professional with them and making them part of the team.

Negotiating a Balance

Mentors spoke about the difficulties with supporting a candidate as they learned to teach while also taking on the role of evaluating them to determine if they were sufficiently prepared to instruct. When the mentor became comfortable with a candidate, they would give them the freedom to try out teaching ideas in the classroom. Occasionally these forays into teaching failed miserably and mentors felt the need to step in and take over. More often, teacher candidates' efforts were successful. As they explored ideas together, mentors thought candidates learned to evaluate their own teaching and that this was an important part of teacher development. Gene, a ten-year English teacher, articulated this process:

I want to give the freedom to try things that she wants to try. And allow her to notice the things that worked or didn't work on her own. I want to be there to just talk with her. She sometimes will ask, "[w]hat do you suggest?" I might say, "[t]ry this or maybe do this, but what you did this way was really good." Instead of criticizing…I don't know how to explain it. I'm not sitting here like my principal when she comes in and critiques me.

Mentors viewed the freedom to fail as important to the process for learning to teach.. Stanley identified it as "self-discovery" and described it as:

I actually feel like it's not necessary to throw them into the fire. It is being there as a support, as a guide, and to intervene when you have to. But allowing them to figure out…what works in an actual classroom. Theories are great, but practicality is different… I think that through failure we find out what are our strengths and what are our weaknesses and what did we do wrong and this allows a lot for self-reflection. So, what I am trying to encourage is for them to consistently evaluate themselves and figure out where they are in the process. And ultimately, really, if teaching is for them.

Despite a willingness to let teacher candidates try out ideas about teaching and their belief in the value of occasional failures, mentors also appeared to be well aware of their responsibilities. Karl announced this directly to teacher candidates when he felt he needed to do so.

> Ultimately, they have to work within my classroom and how it is set up by me. I am still the boss…These are still my kids in here. And whether what I am doing is right or not, it's mine to decide. This is what I try to get them to understand.

Mentors described the ongoing dialogue with teacher candidates as supportive of their own growth and understanding of what it means to teach –an opportunity to thoughtfully reflect on failures or difficulties to improve as a teacher. Working with candidates was a recursive process made more valuable by the length of time they worked together. Rhonda, a twenty-year veteran and experienced mentor noted, "the long-term field experience provided multiple opportunities to address what Natalie might still need to learn."

Like Rhonda, most interviewed mentors were aware that teacher candidates required "a gentle touch" during critiques about beginning efforts to teach. Mentors explained that "support was essential for maintaining an open dialogue" with the candidate. They worried that too much "critiquing early on" might discourage that openness and trust in the relationship, which is necessary for professional growth. Stanley explained that he "really loved the ability to sort of problem solve and offer suggestions and talk about theory as we practice it."

Sometimes the nature of the relationship placed mentors in a difficult position, particularly if candidates were not progressing in a timely fashion. "One thing I don't like, managing somebody who is quasi-peer, quasi-student. There's a managerial aspect to it that is really kind of tricky. None of us are really trained for that," Stanley added. "Knowing how to critique without destroying is a skill that I realize I haven't always had."

Stanley and several other mentors advocated for regularly structured observations by CoT faculty as a means to reduce the tension between support and supervision, but acknowledged difficulties this might entail. Stanley thought mentors might do well to include feedback to teacher candidates in a more structured way:

> It's the easiest thing in the world to just use casual conversations at the end of the day or between classes and just say, 'I've done my job.' And, though I hate the structured thing, it's probably really smart and that's one thing I would encourage –a mandated, structured observation. Maybe this is me personally, but I have a real difficulty with 'hey, I'm now going to use a structured observation.' It seems heavy suddenly, and makes it seem like there is a problem…if it's just an expectation all the way through, it makes it easier.

Other mentors also expressed concern about how to provide sufficient feedback to teacher candidates and worried that letting teacher candidates discover their own best practice in teaching is insufficient. Rhonda worried that student teachers might not be able to identify when they needed help or that they would be reluctant to seek it: "Sometimes I worry that I am too loosey-goosey with throwing them out there to the wolves and they're too polite to say to me, 'I need more structure from you.'"

In other instances, mentors became aware that teacher candidates were not acquiring needed professional competencies, or wondered if they needed to give more explicit direction. Susan reported that she initially felt uncertain about how much she should direct the teacher candidate about specific activities in the classroom. As the candidate began student teaching, Susan worried about the students in the classroom testing boundaries, making them difficult to reset when she took the class over again. She also worried that students would be less likely to learn what they needed while the teacher candidate was learning to teach. When she sat down with the candidate

to discuss concerns, the two women realized that they differed in their approaches to classroom management. Because they had established a long-term relationship, they were comfortable discussing their conflict and problem-solved the differences together. They discussed "classroom management ideas together and ultimately developed a plan" that they both felt comfortable after acknowledging their "different philosophies."

Other efforts to work out differences between mentors and teacher candidates were less successful. David, the science teacher who was asked to take over mentoring duties by school administrators reported struggling to help Lance learn habits that were valuable to meet the professional responsibilities of teaching. He explained that Lance did not have "a sense of what is appropriate during class time. He would use his phone in class, something I would never do. Seems like small things, but they are professional things." As the relationship developed, David tried to help Lance acquire better work habits to little or no avail.

> I have not been able to instill in Lance or develop a pattern in grading work on time or grading at ALL. I would make lists of the things that we need…and date it, and put my name on it…and then check up, and then there was still no movement at all on his part.

Discussion

We set about to understand the perspective of the practicing teachers who become mentors in a teacher preparation program. Our findings largely confirm what other researchers have found when examining the perspective of practicing teachers taking on a supervisory or cooperating teacher role. For the most part, the mentors we interviewed enjoyed the role. They valued having candidates in their room because it provided the students in their classroom with an additional adult who could provide support, guidance, and instruction. They also felt that mentoring provided an opportunity to pass along what they had learned about teaching to those individuals who would follow them in education. They noted how they often learned from the candidates and that they valued the reciprocal and generative nature of the relationship. They also acknowledged that the relationship was "tricky," especially when requested to evaluate a candidate that they viewed as a friend and peer.

Mentors described their dialogue with candidates as informal and ongoing. Some provided written commentary about a lesson observed, or modeled a specific strategy for the candidate. Mentors were comfortable with informal systems of feedback, yet a few commented that a more formal, structured evaluation would benefit candidates.

There is value in long-term field placements that provide an opportunity for candidates to develop a relationship with a practicing teacher. The voices of the participants articulate the inherent value of having a relationship over time, allowing mentors and candidates to learn about each other and gain trust. This enables them to be forthcoming in communication so they may discuss complex, volatile issues inherent in the inevitable uncertainty of teaching. The relationship solidifies as they identify beliefs and understandings, allowing candidates to implement practice from a mutually informed perspective.

Mentors value being chosen by candidates. It is the vehicle through which the relationship forms. A process that encourages initiative in teacher candidates, it likewise offers agency to mentors serving to validate themselves as good teachers and pass along a legacy. The experience of being chosen, and choosing to mentor, helps them view the relationship as a partnership. The process fosters self-confidence, professionalism, and self-discovery for the mentor and the teacher candidate. They recognized the considerable influence they had on candidates and welcomed the

opportunity. For the candidate, the act of selecting serves as a first step in defining the teacher they seek to become.

The mentors also viewed the partnership as complex. There was some discomfort in the role, especially when asked to offer critical feedback. Most mentors privileged providing support over critique, which they viewed as the responsibility of the university. We agree with the mentors, since the responsibility of moving candidates toward licensure rests with the office of teacher education. Given the likely unpleasant aspects of providing negative feedback, it is more than what mentors sign up to do. Detailed and specific feedback, whether positive or corrective, is important whether delivered to students in the classroom or to candidates in the field. Mentors are in a good position to give timely feedback that is both positive and critical.

Mentors sometimes identified less positive experiences with a candidate. In the case of David, the absence of choice was detrimental to his relationship with Lance. In most circumstances, conflicts were easily resolved and mentors acknowledged value in the experience. Assigning candidates to field placements appears more likely to result in less than optimal pairings since preferences and teaching philosophies may be incompatible. Having a choice about accepting a candidate fosters a contemplative act for both parties. Each individual must critically examine the self before making a decision, leading to professional growth.

Implications

Our findings have implications for teacher preparation. We support expanding field experiences and extending student teaching. These mentors' stories illuminate the connections and disconnections between the theoretical knowledge about teaching and the practical actuality of classroom instruction. It is difficult to negotiate differences between what might be and what is. Extended time in field placement offers the opportunity for candidates to examine how preparation and teaching connect, and how they fail. Like the mentors in our study, we recognize the need to work through others to reflect and improve our practice. We value and acknowledge the expertise inherent in the practical activities of teaching. As partners in the process of preparing new teachers, mentors form personal and professional relationships, agree on teaching strategies, create opportunities to reflect, and share practices. These partnerships illuminate the ongoing challenges and rewards inherent in being and becoming a teacher.

Limitations

Our findings warrant caution when objectivity is suspect. The authors of the study were and are participants within the CoT program, so acknowledging bias is valid. We were rigorous in our data collection, analysis, and member checking. There are additional limitations in that no interviewees engaged in other teacher programs. Comparing our data set to a comparable data set from supervisory teachers (mentors) in a more traditional program may have provided deeper understanding. Logistics and time required to observe alternative participants made this task impossible to accomplish.

Conclusion

Scholars are increasingly calling for a greater emphasis on clinical experience and extending experiences in the field. CoT features long-term partnerships between candidates and mentors.

Time alone is probably insufficient to assure that teacher candidates have adequate field experiences. Kemmis et al. (2014) reminds us that, "[t]he way mentoring is practiced produces, reproduces, and transforms the dispositions of both mentors and mentees" (p. 157). Teacher programs need to be mindful about the relationships that develop between practicing teachers and teacher candidates during field experiences, especially over longer periods. Our study provides insight into the experiences of mentors involved in extended placements and we suspect that what we have found here provides valuable insights teacher education programs may wish to consider should they pursue a long-term field placement model.

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