Inquiry-Oriented Mentoring in the Professional Development School: Two Illustrations

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ABSTRACT: This article introduces the process of inquiry-oriented mentoring as an appropriate tool for developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of mentors who work with prospective teachers within the professional development school. The process shows promise as a tool for capturing the knowledge of what constitutes powerful mentoring practices, by drawing on the systematic study of mentors engaged in studying their own work. Drawing on the tenants of teacher inquiry, this article offers two illustrations of what inquiry-oriented mentoring looks like, and it discusses how inquiry-oriented mentoring might contribute to deepening the mentoring knowledge base.

The Holmes Group (1990) names inquiry and reflection as central components to achieving the simultaneous renewal sought in viable professional development school (PDS) partnerships. Hence, one critical component for all members of a PDS is engagement in teacher inquiry (Dana & Silva, 2002; Dana, Silva, & Snow-Gerono, 2002). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define teacher inquiry as systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own classroom practice. There exist four main reasons for the longevity of the teacher inquiry concept, as well as its centrality to PDS work: First, the inquiry process has proven to be a powerful tool for teacher professional development (Zeichner, 2003), and one core goal of PDS work is the professional development of practicing teachers and administrators. Second, the inquiry process has proven to be a powerful mechanism for prospective teachers to learn about the culture of schools and the characteristics and needs of the children in their classrooms (Fueyo & Neves, 1995), and one core goal of PDS work is prospective-teacher preparation. Third, the inquiry process has become an important vehicle to raise teachers' voices in educational reform (Meyers & Rust, 2003), and one core goal of PDS work is to raise practitioners' voices in simultaneous renewal efforts in public school education and university teacher preparation. Fourth, the inquiry process is a mechanism for expanding the knowledge base for teaching in important ways (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), and one core goal of PDS work is to make contributions to the knowledge base for teaching through the power of schools and universities' partnering in research efforts.

Inquiring professionals conduct research on their classroom practice by posing questions, or wonderings; by collecting data to

gain insights into their wonderings; by analyzing the data, along with reading relevant literature, making changes in practice based on new understandings developed during inquiry, and sharing findings with others (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). The ultimate goal of engagement in teacher research is to create an inquiry stance toward teaching. To achieve this stance, teachers must first understand the inherent complexity of teaching. An inquiry stance actually becomes a professional positioning owned by the teacher, where questioning one's practice becomes part of the teacher's work and, eventually, a part of the teaching culture. By cultivating this inquiry stance toward teaching, teachers play a critical role in enhancing their professional growth and, ultimately, the experience of schooling for children (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008, 2009). According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001),

> a legitimate and essential purpose of professional development is the development of an inquiry stance on teaching that is critical and transformative, a stance linked not only to high standards for the learning of all students but also to social change and social justice and to the individual and collective professional growth of teachers. (p. 46)

A great deal of attention has been given to the adaptation and development of an inquiry stance toward teaching and learning in the PDS. For example, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (2001) standards for the PDS state that inquiry is the process through which professional and student learning are integrated. Tunks and Neapolitan (2007) state that inquiry helps to sustain the functions of student learning, professional development, and teacher preparation in PDSs. Less attention has been focused on applying the tenets of an inquiry stance to the process of mentoring, which according to Wang (2001), is "one of the most important strategies to support novices' learning to teach and, thus, to improve the quality of teaching" (p. 52). What is an inquiry-oriented approach to mentoring? What does it look like and why is it important? Why are PDSs a critical context for inquiry-oriented mentoring to take place? The purpose of this article is to explore these questions and provide illustrations about (1) the ways that inquiry can inform and improve mentoring practice and (2) the central role that PDSs can play to cultivating inquiry-oriented mentoring as a part of one's mentoring practice.

What Is an Inquiry-Oriented Approach to Mentoring and Why Is It Important?

Numerous mentor teachers in the PDS engage in teacher research, either independently or in collaboration with PDS interns and university supervisors, as a part of their PDS work (Dana & Silva, 2002; Frankes, Valli, & Cooper, 1998; National Center for Restructuring Education Schools and Teaching, 1993; Snow-Gerono, 2005). The focus of this teacher research is to gain insights into one's own pedagogy or into the particular learners of one's classroom during any given school year. PDS teachers develop wonderings that emerge from tensions and dilemmas of classroom practice; they collect and analyze data to gain insights into these questions; and they make changes to classroom practice based on the new knowledge that they have constructed through the inquiry process. As such, PDS teachers can utilize the process of inquiry to explore the ways that one transitions from a teacher of children to a teacher educator and mentor in the PDS. According to Wang (2001),

> relevant teaching experience, though important, is not a sufficient condition for a teacher to be a professional mentor. Mentors who are practicing or moving toward practicing the reform-minded teaching may not develop the necessary conceptions and practices of mentoring that offer all the crucial opportunities for novices to learn to teach in a similar way. (pp. 71–72)

As Wang suggests, just as teaching is an inherently complex activity, so is mentoring. Because of mentoring's complexity, it is natural and normal for many problems, issues, tensions, and dilemmas to emerge for mentor teachers as they work with novices. An inquiry-oriented approach to mentoring acknowledges this complexity. Inquiry-oriented mentors define wonderings that emerge from their work with novice teachers; they collect and analyze data to help them gain insights into those wonderings; and they continue to learn and grow as mentor teachers in the same ways that they have continued to learn and grow as classroom teachers throughout their professional lifetimes. When mentors apply the tenets of teacher research to their mentoring practice and make their inquiries transparent to their mentees, they create another mechanism for modeling lifelong learning and reflection for the novices with whom they work. In addition, mentoring, like teaching, is riddled with multiple layers of dilemmas and tensions that constantly call for resolution (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2007). Through inquiry, these problems can be prioritized and managed in a way that can minimize the tensions between being responsible for the learning outcomes of children and being responsible for the preparation of new teachers. Inquiry can provide a lens to help mentors develop an awareness of, and then articulate, their taken-for-granted assumptions, agendas, aims, and practices. In addition, the teacher research process can offer mentors a way to name, reframe, and transcend problems, thereby making dilemmas of mentoring practice potential sources for wonder, empowerment, and celebration.

What Does an Inquiry-Oriented Approach to Mentoring Look Like?

We would like to share two illustrations of mentors who found that an inquiry stance helped them to problematize the relationship between the learning of their prospective teachers and their own learning as mentors. The first illustration is written by Darby, one of our authors, who used inquiry-oriented mentoring as she worked with a prospective teacher in her middle school history classroom. The second illustration comes from Don, who shared his story with us about how he took an inquiry approach to his mentoring as he worked with two prospective teachers in his fifth-grade classroom.

Illustration 1: Darby's Account of Her Work as an Inquiry-Oriented Mentor

I regularly hosted secondary social studies interns in my eighth-grade U.S. history classroom. I did so because I was passionate about continually renewing my practice as a teacher through the content area expertise and pedagogical ideas offered by the bright and eager prospective teachers from our partnering university. My fascination began to turn, however, toward inquiring into my own mentoring practices after having been through a year of unusual professional transformation as a candidate for National Board Certification (see National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, http://www.nbpts.org/for_candidates). That year, I was on the receiving end of being mentored by three of my very talented colleagues. The increased sense of efficacy that I experienced from this collaboration and the impact that it had on my students' learning were so profound that I turned my attention to further empowering my role as a mentor.

The next year, I had the opportunity to work with Esteban, an intern from our partnering university. At the same time, I was taking a graduate course that explored issues of language and the power of inquiry. Esteban was a master storyteller, and he used language and narrative as an engaging teaching and classroom management tool. However, he also brought with him verbal behaviors and incoming beliefs about authority and respect that were not effective in the teaching role. These beliefs and behaviors were in direct opposition to my professional values and aims as an edu-

cator. I later found out that Esteban had come to associate these beliefs and behaviors with teaching from his secondary school experiences in an all-boys Jesuit school. I had read literature on the power that apprenticeships of observation have in shaping the incoming beliefs of prospective teachers. I wondered how we could work together to make his incoming beliefs conscious enough to be critically examined; however, the more urgent difficulty I had came out of my journal:

> How do I help [Esteban] change his behaviors enough so he doesn't get fired from his first job? How do I do that at the same time I let him explore and make his own choices so that he is empowered as an agent of change? . . . Most of all, how do I give him enough freedom to learn while maintaining the [psychological safety] of my students at the same time?

This dilemma led me to wonder how we could use Esteban's storytelling as a place to reframe his perspective, or weave new threads into his story, of what it looks like and sounds like to be an effective social studies teacher in a public school setting. Within this process, I wanted to help him explore and then experience alternative views related to respect and authority in ways that would expand, rather than hinder, his practice. I had just read about transformational learning, a concept offered by Jack Mezirow (2000). Mezirow says that adults make meaning by working from within their historical belief systems and that it is through reflective discourse and dialogue that they can significantly change and transform these meanings. I thought about getting Esteban to tell his stories, as rooted in his historical apprenticeship of observation in the Jesuit school, and then helping him reflect on these stories through powerful dialogue with his students, his colleagues, and myself; as such, I thought that he might be able to restory his idea of what it looks like and sounds like to be a teacher worthy of respect. I then believed that the inconsistencies in his class management skills and his rocky relationships with the students would improve.

To gain insights into my wondering, Esteban agreed to let me study his professional growth during his internship. In addition, I examined my own professional growth as a mentor through this process. Together, Esteban and I engaged in systematic data collection that came from a shared journal, which we passed back and forth, as well as from taped interviews, observations, field notes, focus groups with our students, and audio recordings captured from our daily lunchtime spent with one of my mentors, a 1st-year teacher, and another intern. Finally, we used the Teacher Cam, a video camera that students and I used to capture Esteban when he went into a storytelling episode. Esteban and I invited our students to participate in our coinquiry as a way to model and reinforce the inquiry strand within our social studies curriculum. We wanted to share our ongoing learning and renewal with our students, as well as gain their valuable perspectives as they witnessed this journey.

The data collection process itself offered Esteban and me a constant reminder of the nature of our work, which centered on inquiring into how he could be a better teacher and how I could be a better mentor. I believe that our collecting and analyzing data as a team accelerated this process for both of us. Our lunchtime dialogue with colleagues was one of the most powerful places that Esteban's original image of an authoritative teacher was transformed, as evident in transcripts of these taped sessions. In these conversations, our colleagues respected and deeply understood Esteban's incoming beliefs but also challenged them with varying degrees of nudging. In these sessions, I consciously worked to recast stories of Esteban's teaching that occurred earlier in the day; I did so in ways that challenged what he perceived as failure on his part and that reframed the episodes as genuine success from my point of view.

Over time his stories about what it means to be in a position of authority shifted from themes of his being entitled to automatic respect to those of coming to earn respect from his students. There was no shortcut for this. Thus, his stories began to reveal a new strand of understanding about respect. In them, respect came through Esteban's hard work of modeling and practicing ideal behaviors that

he and I (and the students) believed defined a democratic classroom community. He found that the values behind these behaviors could also support a strong social studies pedagogy in which young adolescents find their voices while respecting those of others.

At the end of the internship, Esteban received this anonymous note from a student:

> Dear Mr. B.,
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> The favorite thing that we did was talking. I don't mean you and me personally talking but the whole class talking to you and you talking back. I have a lot of respect for you Mr. B. You're a great teacher and you'll of course do well with your own class. Some advice. . . . Just listen to Ms. D. on that one. Also listen to your students. That's right—your students. You now share this class with Ms. D. We're all your students now.

I believe that the inquiry into my own mentoring practices helped Esteban become a better teacher and me, a better mentor. The process of inquiry gave us a framework that I have since identified and adapted from the New London Group's (1996) development for an effective pedagogy for multiliteracies. This group identifies four dimensions that need to be applied to adult learning: overt instruction, situated practice, critical framing, and transformation. Through my inquiry into my mentoring practices, I found the need to provide overt instruction by explicitly pointing out to Esteban multiple points of view regarding concepts of authority and respect. This was done in collaboration with my colleagues. The classroom then provided a real-life context, or situated practice, in which Esteban could try on these multiple perspectives and I could collect data on their impact on his relationship with his students. We also did the difficult work of critically framing, or deconstructing, assumptions that we had packed within our beliefs about power, authority, and respect. We were engaged in inquiry; as such, the process became a way for us to respond to the disequilibrium that this unlearning created for Esteban as well as myself. The inquiry process ultimately offered a place for both Esteban and me to experience transformation within our professional identities—he as a teacher and I as a mentor.

Illustration 2: Our Account of Don's Work as an Inquiry-Oriented Mentor

Whereas Darby identified her work as inquiry-oriented mentoring and carved out the time to write about her mentoring experiences, many mentors use inquiry-oriented mentoring as a tool for resolving dilemmas of practice while strengthening their mentoring practice. In this account, we share another example of how inquiry-oriented mentoring can emerge within a PDS.

Don was passionate about novices' learning to teach in a PDS and their need to experience strong, contextually sensitive mentoring during early field experiences. Don recognized that schools were complex organizations and that he himself struggled at times to navigate the various mandates with the needs of his students; as such, he believed that his mentoring work needed to not only help novice teachers understand this complexity but resolve some of it.

Because of his passion, he enjoyed mentoring prospective teachers from our university, early in their program. Each semester, Don hosted a pair of preinterns who spent five mornings a week in his classroom. He always looked forward to their arrival; that is, he relied on their presence to carry out the targeted small-group instruction that he believed was essential to student learning within his classroom. Although early field experiences often consist of observation and individual student tutoring efforts, in Don's room the prospective teachers were quickly integrated into the routines of the day.

As pressure began mounting from the state, district, and school levels, Don felt pressure to make a plan to help his students perform well on the state assessment test. Many of his colleagues voiced that having prospective teachers in their classrooms during the semester of preparation for the high-stakes test was

unwise in that it created distractions and interruptions in the time that they had to prepare students for the test. This created a terrible tension for Don. Although he recognized that integrating the needs of his students and the prospective teachers was difficult, he refused to identify this barrier as one that was insurmountable. As he pondered the tension, he realized that although he did not want to teach to the test, he knew that the tested skills were important to his students' success and that it was his responsibility to ensure that his students were successful. In spite of the tension, Don remained committed to mentoring new teachers. He began to brainstorm how to utilize his mentees effectively during the month of February, where all attention in his school turned to preparing students for high-stakes testing. In addition, he went one step further. Don began to think about how he could help his mentees learn about the contextual influences related to preparing students for high-stakes tests and the dilemmas associated with this area of curricular decision making.

In response to this challenge, Don turned to teacher research to explore his dilemma and to identify ways to integrate his mentees into the dilemma's solution. Don had worked for many years coaching prospective teachers and their inquiry. He used teacher inquiry as a systematic way to study his own teaching practice each year, which had become a tradition in the culture of Don's PDS.

Armed with the inquiry tools, Don began by crafting this inquiry question: "In what ways can interns be effectively utilized to help my students prepare for a high-stakes test?" In addition to answering his overarching question, he had a number of subquestions that he wanted to explore. He wondered whether he could focus on preparing students for the state assessment in a way that would also foster a meaningful learning experience for novice teachers. He also wanted to figure out how to negotiate the tension that existed between his commitment to mentoring and his reluctance to relinquish complete control of leading the instructional time during the month of February. What if his students would not get the preparation that they needed to perform well on the state assessment test that month?

To gain insights into his wondering, Don shared his question with his interns Ann and Carla. This discussion helped the interns understand the pressures that he was feeling and that they themselves would soon experience as they moved into their own classrooms. They decided that the first task that Ann and Carla could help with was the preassessment of every student's math skills. Initial data such as these on each student could be powerful information for designing instruction to prepare students as a whole for the state assessment. Don knew that, logistically, he could never have collected these data without his mentees' help. These math preassessments became the first form of data used for informing his instruction and answering his mentoring question.

After collecting the student data, the three of them analyzed the preassessments together. As Don talked through the data, identifying the patterns along the way, Ann and Carla witnessed how a teacher thinks about content, skills, and students. Ann and Carla shared insights that they gleaned from the student data. From their collaborative analysis, they ascertained that all the students were weak in their graphing skills, which Don knew would be a substantial part of the state assessment.

Given their preliminary data, Don and his mentees decided to target three areas for math literacy instruction: how to read a graph, how to make a graph, and how to solve word problems utilizing a graph. They decided that they could keep a closer eye on the students' development in these areas if they lowered the teacher–student ratio—namely, by each working with a small group. Ann, Carla, and Don worked to design small-group lessons on each component of graphing that they had targeted for instruction.

During the next week, Don organized his morning math time into stations. A third of the class worked with Don, a third with Ann, and a third with Carla. Working with a small group, Don, Ann, and Carla could each adjust their lessons, being responsive to the children in their groups. As they worked with their

small groups, they kept detailed records on each learner and how his or her graphing skills were developing. Over the course of the week, all learners rotated through each group, and the record book rotated with them so that each teacher became privy to the students' struggles and strengths at previous stations.

As Don implemented this plan, he collected data that included the original preassessments, the lesson plans that the three of them had developed, records of student learning at each station, and interviews with his mentees that occurred at the end of the station week. Don also kept his own journal. At the end of each week, the three of them met to discuss the data related to student, mentee, and mentor learning. They were positioned to make sense of learning across these three groups. As they reviewed their progress, they identified ways to improve their collaboration, building on the needs of the students and the skills of each teacher.

When Don analyzed the final data, he discovered that novices could indeed be effectively utilized in the critical month of February and that they could simultaneously learn about teaching by helping to prepare students for a high-stakes test. His mentees learned about planning, using student data to guide instruction, collaborating with others, managing small-group instruction, and organizing and managing a classroom. They even had the opportunity to explore some of the politics and pressures of high-stakes assessment and its implications for teaching. They had access to a teacher's thinking as Don talked aloud about his sense making and concerns along the way. Don expressed to us that had he not engaged in this inquiry, he would never have learned how to transform an unfavorable situation—such as extreme administrative pressure to focus on state test preparation—and turn it into a powerful learning situation for everyone, including novice teachers. Without including inquiry into his mentoring, Don reflected that he may have just given up his role as a mentor altogether. The next stage, he believed, was to share his inquiry with his colleagues—namely, those who also struggled with the challenge of integrating prospective teachers into the classroom during a time of intense accountability pressures.

Why Are PDSs a Critical Context for Inquiry-Oriented Mentoring to Take Place?

Inquiry is already used as a tool in the PDS for improving teaching, precisely because of the inherent complexity of the act. These illustrations make transparent how the tensions and dilemmas associated with the complexity of mentoring can be unearthed, explored, and resolved through the inquiry process. The endeavor of mentoring prospective teachers in the PDS deserves to be supported, explored, and developed through inquiry. Little attention has been given to the development of the mentors' role within the PDS and the vehicles that must be in place to support mentors' ongoing professional development as school-based teacher educators. One way to support the ongoing development of mentors is to regularly meet with them to engage in a systematic study of their practice as a part of their mentoring work within the PDS. As discussed in these illustrations, teacher research offers a powerful tool for transforming and building a mentoring practice.

In addition to building one's own practice, inquiry-oriented mentoring provides a tool for mentors to systematically contribute to the literature on mentoring. By making public the inquiry work of mentor teachers, we can unveil the nuances and complexities of this professional role. In doing so, we expand the Holmes Group's original vision, which upholds the need for including the mentor teachers' experiences in PDS partnership work. The PDS is where a strong knowledge base for inquiry-oriented mentoring practices is just waiting to be generated, thus making it a potential nexus for research and practice in mentoring. The PDS is an appropriate place for such work because one of its primary goals is to mentor teachers into the profession. Inquiry needs to influence the craft of mentoring for the entire teacher education profession. SUP

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