STUDYING MENTORS AND MENTORING FROM A LEARNER-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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Teacher candidates, while completing their student teaching internship, are part of an important teaching-and-learning triad. The other members of the triad, mentor teachers and university field instructors, provide essential support to teacher candidates throughout the student teaching internship experience (Yee, 1968). Recent research has examined the roles of mentor teachers and university field instructors. Not as much is understood, however, about the moments or experiences teacher candidates recognize as when they learned the most about teaching. With retirements increasing and as much as 50% leaving the field within the first five years of teaching (Shwartz & Dori, 2016), there is an urgency in studying, and hopefully improving, novice teacher support systems.

In this dissertation, I explore the moments or experiences teacher candidates recognize as insightful and valuable from their student teaching experience, from the perspective of four recent student teachers. Using phenomenology as a method of inquiry (Giorgi, 1985), data were collected through phenomenological interviews of four teacher candidates after they completed a year-long student teaching internship. These interviews tell the story of teacher candidates becoming through learning (Hodkinson et al., 2008).

Findings indicate that framing problems of practice within practical situations, situations that likely occur in an elementary classroom, positively influence teacher candidates' learning. The practice of adaptative mentoring (van Ginkel et al., 2015) provides opportunities for mentor teachers to support teacher candidates as they learn about teaching practice, while also helping

them with emotional and practical concerns. Ultimately, I argue that grounding mentoring in both the *how* and *why* of teaching, along with adapting to the individual needs of teacher candidates, provides supportive opportunities for teacher candidates' learning.

This work is dedicated to my husband and my children without whose constant support this dissertation would not be possible.

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Chapter I

Introduction

One of the most impactful mentors from literature and the movies is Albus Dumbledore from the Harry Potter series. A long-time educator, Dumbledore recognized strengths and weaknesses inherent in his students—and his teachers. Humble but clever, moral, and accomplished, Dumbledore empowered his faculty to make decisions in the best interests of their students. At the same time, recognizing children learn and think differently, Dumbledore gave them plenty of room to make mistakes, while also being ready to assist with advice and support.

Dumbledore's best quality, I believe, was understanding when to lead and when to listen. He used his own life experiences to guide the choices he made when he mentored the main character, Harry Potter. Like all people, Dumbledore made mistakes. He used these as signposts, however, so that his future decisions were as effective as he could make them.

Effective decision-making is easier understood in books than in real life. In books, the thinking behind characters' actions is often omnipresent. This means readers understand both Dumbledore's and Harry's thinking. Just as useful, readers are provided moments in which they "hear" the thoughts characters have about others. Thus, when Harry has moments of doubt about his mentor, Dumbledore, readers know. When Harry acts on what he learned from Dumbledore, readers likewise know.

Arguably, the choices Harry Potter made throughout the series would not be understood without also understanding his mentor, Dumbledore. Their life and learning, their growth as characters, is so deeply intertwined as to be rendered illegible when read in isolation. Real life, on the other hand, does not usually expose people to what a mentee or mentor might be thinking in the moment. Reflecting on the moments when Harry was engrossed in thinking through big

decisions, he often considered the perspective he believed Dumbledore wanted him to have and made decisions from there.

Dumbledore's actions throughout the series reflected his belief that people need to own the decisions they made. As a school leader and mentor, Dumbledore provided space for his teachers to learn and grow from their mistakes. This is particularly evident in the manner by which Dumbledore supported Severus Snape, a former student who became the school's potions instructor. For his part, Snape made mistakes and reflected with Dumbledore, albeit reluctantly, about his thinking and his actions.

In real life, we cannot directly see how our works and actions influence another person. If I am mentoring a teacher candidate, and I see a change in their practice, I do not know which combination of factors have come together to create this change. Thus, research like that undertaken in this study is necessary. Its goal is to preserve all the narrative flavor of a good novel, while at the same time uncovering the "silent things" of the lifeworld—motivations, thoughts, and habits that might otherwise remain unsaid or implicit.

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Thinking back to the semester I completed my student teaching placement, sometime in the mid-nineties, I believe my mentor was somewhat like Dumbledore. I took over all subjects in his class, worked through classroom management challenges, and tried to learn everything I could about teaching. I remember my mentor teacher believed all students could be successful and he showed me it was important to help them be so. He also believed in strong classroom management. Throughout my years teaching elementary school I used many of the strategies he taught me about classroom management.

While my own growth was inseparable from my relationship with him, there were ways in which our relationship departed from that of the Dumbledore. To start with, our thoughts were not completely transparent to each other. There was no narrator telling us what the other thought. I did not sit down to debrief about my teaching practice. I remember, instead, learning tips from my mentor teacher about the math and reading curriculum. And as mentioned in the previous paragraph, I learned strategies for effective classroom management. We discussed helping individual students, as well as project-based learning (PBL). None of these conversations were unwarranted, but I do not remember meeting with my mentor teacher to discuss my practice.

Reflecting on my student teaching experience I am grateful for the confidence my mentor teacher had in me, not unlike the confidence Dumbledore had in Harry Potter. But much like Harry appeared in the books, I was plagued with feelings of uncertainty and doubt.

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Like most education majors, I took subject-area classes, classes on how to be an elementary teacher, and I volunteered in local classrooms. Professional development sessions at the university focused on thematic planning, preparing for substitute teaching, and how to recognize gang activity in schools. I still have my student teaching handbook. My university field instructor encouraged my cohort to ask plenty of questions of our mentor teachers and take pictures of neat classroom designs we might choose for our own schoolrooms.

My first classroom was at a Montessori school, and it was there that I connected with a style of learning I continue to believe is best for students. When I completed my studies of how to teach the Montessori way, however, I did so with minimal mentoring, relying instead on my Montessori-trained colleagues to help me learn. The Montessori center at which I studied

struggled to find me a suitable mentor, a situation I learned later beset many Montessori training centers.

Like many Montessori teachers-in-training, my professional learning occurred in classes- through lectures and rehearsals, and through teaching. This is, in fact, the way most teacher candidates learn. Mentors become essential as teacher candidates move into the classrooms because mentors both model for and observe them at work. Professional learning, key to the growth of teacher candidates, occurs in the classroom through practice and through mentoring. Mentoring, on one hand, might limit a candidate's growth if it is primarily grounded in criticism (Schön, 1987). If, for example, Dumbledore utilized only criticism when he guided Professor Snape through the loss of Lily Potter, he may have pushed Snape into making very different decisions about the life of Lily's son, Harry. Because Dumbledore both commiserated with Snape, and talked through, without outright blame, Snape's actions, he demonstrated for Snape a way to redirect his grief and anger, so that Snape reshaped his way forward.

Moving forward through my professional practice, I was fortunate to have a few engaged mentors. My first mentor in the Montessori Method, a teaching colleague, often asked me, "Why did you do that?" She, in fact, asked more questions of me than gave advice. Her way of mentoring, by asking questions and responding to my answers, appears to resemble that of Schon's *Reflective Practitioner*, meaning we did not "reflect-in-action" as much as we "reflected-on-action;" a difference, I believe, that encouraged my growth as a young Montessori practitioner (Schön, 1983).

During my years as a classroom teacher, my practitioner growth occurred through graduate classes, which took place alongside my everyday teaching, through experience in the classroom, and through Montessori conferences. I became more metacognitive of how teacher

growth occurred while hosting preservice teachers, and while mentoring a teacher candidate. In the space where teacher candidates and preservice teachers existed, a space I entered somewhat tentatively as a Montessori educator, I became interested in how teacher candidates learned about teaching.

I wondered if learning about teaching might somehow be connected to the way I learned the Montessori Method. In other words, where did mentoring fit? While Montessori training includes rigorous lecture and rehearsals, once teachers are trained, they primarily learn in, and through, their practice. Yet I recognized a need for someone outside to be available for listening and reflection. My continued interest in exploring this question is what led me to my Ph.D. studies at Michigan State University.

It could be argued my time at Michigan State was well spent, just as it could be argued it was too long. Both are true. What I realized during my doctoral studies is that educators cannot pay "lip service" to mentoring. Committed mentors, I realized, embody the practice in all ways. Just as Dumbledore mentored through his words and his actions, the mentors that helped my growth during this time, did the same. It is because of these individuals, and some not-so-gentle prodding from a persistent teenager,[1] that the findings from my study are presented in this dissertation study.

What Do Teacher Candidates Tell Us About Learning to Teach?

In 2013, I started my doctoral studies at Michigan State University. I worked with other individuals interested in studying how mentoring teacher candidates might become a more intentional practice. I learned to balance my learning in the field with learning through research. As a University Field Instructor (UFT) working with teacher candidates in a year-long student

[1] My youngest daughter has been one of my biggest supporters throughout this dissertation process. She supported me at my busiest, nagged me when it was necessary, and left encouraging notes in unexpected places.

teaching internship, I spent a great deal of time with student teachers. We met after teaching sessions to discuss their work; we talked about their triumphs in the classroom and times they doubted their effectiveness. I listened to them discuss personal troubles and became, at times, a voice of reason in a year of busyness and hard work.

The phenomena that came to the forefront of my thinking emerged early in my doctoral studies and in the year that I, as part of a team of UFTs, worked with mentor teachers to study and support their mentoring practices. Throughout the academic year, I met monthly with a project facilitator and my mentor teachers to deconstruct mentoring practices and discuss how those practices might support teacher candidates' practices.

The more I worked with teacher candidates and their mentor teachers, the more I learned about mentoring practices; I, in turn, became deeply interested in what the teacher candidates took away from their mentor teachers. In other words, what did they value and remember? By interrogating four teacher candidates about times, during student teaching, they feel they really learned something about teaching, would mentor teachers be part of their stories?

Research Questions and Context of the Study

For this dissertation, I conducted a phenomenological study with teacher candidates to examine when those same teacher candidates felt they learned the most about teaching. I investigated aspects of the lifeworld of student teaching, using conversational interviews to stay very close to the experience as it was lived. I sought to examine when, where, and how mentor teachers and mentoring appeared in these stories.

I worked with these teacher candidates in their fifth-year student teaching internship as UFT. In this way, I grew to know the teacher candidates and their mentor teachers rather well. I observed each student teacher multiple times throughout the school year and conducted small

group seminar sessions. I also participated in meetings and study groups with the mentor teachers. The teacher candidates' stories, fresh in their minds, were used to uncover the moment the student teachers found they learned the most about teaching. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Ultimately, I will argue that understanding student teaching through the voices of teacher candidates may provide a fresh perspective for teacher educators and for research on mentoring. Examining impactful moments, as well as considering the role mentoring might have played in those moments, is potentially important for those wishing to enrich the experiences of teacher candidates.

Definition of Key Terms

The common terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Teacher Candidate

A person engaged in P-12 professional education licensure/certification program. This person is sometimes referred to as a student teacher or intern. The teacher candidates in this study attended Michigan State University. They had graduated with their bachelor's degree in Education (four years) and had just completed a year-long student teaching internship (fifth year).

Mentor Teacher

A mentor teacher is an experienced classroom teacher working with a teacher candidate during their student teaching experience. This person is sometimes referred to as a cooperating teacher or host teacher. School leaders or building principals often select the mentor teachers that host teacher candidates; at other times experienced classroom teachers will volunteer to host a teacher candidate.

University Field Instructor (UFT)

The university field instructor is sometimes referred to as a field instructor, field supervisor, or college supervisor. This person represents the university's education program and works with teacher candidates during their student teaching experience. They periodically visit teacher candidates to observe and reflect with them about their teaching. The UFTs may also support mentor teachers if needed.

Dissertation Summary

This chapter has introduced the broad themes of the study and my own living of the question of mentoring. Chapter II offers a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter III describes the phenomenological methodology used in this study. This chapter also discusses my role as researcher, along with presenting background on the participants. Chapter III also presents data collection data analysis. Chapter IV of this dissertation details the research findings. Finally, Chapter V includes the study's discussion, implications, and recommendations.

Chapter II

Situating the Study—Literature Review

Chapter I provided a broad introduction to this research project, while also defining key terms used throughout the rest of this dissertation. In Chapter II, I turn to the context for my work, providing a review of the literature related to this study. This chapter is organized by first examining the student teaching triad and the role of student teaching. I then explore members of the triad: teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and university field instructors (UFTs), as well as their relationship to initial teacher preparation. I next share research on mentoring, as well as some on the university field instructor. Finally, I offer a balance to the student teaching triad by examining teacher candidates' perspectives on the student teaching experience, concluding the chapter by identifying where a knowledge gap may exist and thus where this project is likely centered.

Origins of the Student Teaching Triad

Albert Yee proposed the *student teaching triad* in the late 1960s. Discussing research on teacher education, Yee (1968) noted student teaching, as a culminating practice, was firmly entrenched in teacher education. During student teaching, a teacher candidate (Teacher Candidate) is engaged in dyadic relationships with a host or mentor teacher, and a university field instructor (UFT). Presenting studies in which student teaching was considered by both teacher candidates and teacher education professionals to be the most important part of learning to teach, Yee (1971) also noted the ambiguity inherent in literature surrounding student teaching literature. That is, did empirical work support the effect of student teaching on future teaching success?

Yee (1971) encouraged research that anticipated the future success of teacher candidates and proposed programming and evaluative tasks to determine a "student's probable success as a classroom teacher" (p. 11). Recognizing the need for well-prepared and qualified Teacher candidates, he supported programs with strong teacher education outcomes. Yee (1971), on the other hand, recognizing the challenge in both researching and educating a large amount of Teacher candidates, proposed greater attention to the form and function of the student teaching triad.

Citing research on social organization[2], Yee (1968) proposed that dyad models already existed between the teacher candidate and their supervisor, and the Teacher Candidate and their mentor teacher. Yee termed both the mentor and supervisor *leaders*, while also suggesting their leadership was an important component of the student teaching experience. Suggesting that a greater understanding of the student teaching triad was needed to improve "what is essentially the educational setting in student teaching" (p. 106), Yee (1968) noted the student teaching internship setting and the mentor teacher greatly influence a Teacher Candidate's own teaching practice.

Yee examined the effect practicing mentor teachers and the student teaching setting had on teacher candidates as they learned about teaching. Suggesting schools are only as good as the teachers working inside them, Yee (1968) proposed that teacher educators and schools should work together to create teachers for the future. While he was critical of the structure of many student teaching triads, calling them occasionally inadequate, Yee suggested this inadequacy was largely due to limited involvement upon members of the triad. Believing that teacher education coursework did not, itself, prepare teacher candidates for the realities of daily classroom

[2] see Boyd [1965], *The Group as a Sociopsychological Setting for Learning*

teaching, Yee (1968) proposed closer working relationships, with a focus on continuous feedback and a team-like relationship between teacher candidates, mentors, teacher educators, and even policy makers.

The Student Teaching Triad in Practice

Many scholars, since Yee's studies, have documented tensions and successes in the working relationships centered around teacher candidates. Teacher candidates remain largely positive about their student teaching experience (McKim & Velez, 2017; Valencia et al., 2009). In the same way, researchers also suggested, as had Yee, a need for more research about the student teaching experience (Ambrosetti, et al., 2017; Valencia et al., 2009; Zanting, at al., 2001). Calling the experience almost legendary, Valencia et al. admitted mentor teachers were concerned about teacher candidates being ill-prepared for the experience (2009). Researchers noted, nevertheless, the value of the student teaching experience and suggested teacher educators needed to better understand the roles and interactions of the teacher candidate, mentor teacher, and UFT (Kang, 2021; Mena et al., 2017).

Using interviews, observations, and data gathered across meetings and course, Valencia et al. (2009) found teacher candidates, both elementary and secondary, experienced few "learning to teach" opportunities, even though these were identified as primary goals of the student teaching setting. Their study also noted teacher candidates were offered few moments where they received substantive feedback about their teaching practice. Arguing that the "shifting terrain of the student teaching experience" provided challenges for all members of the triad and sometimes interfered with learning-to-teach opportunities, Valencia et al., suggested competing goals and viewpoints affected teacher candidates' learning (2009).

As I stated in earlier paragraphs, teacher candidates and recently graduated education professionals firmly believe the student teaching placement to be the most impactful experience for learning about teaching. Ambrosetti et al., (2017), so too, found teacher candidates valued the student teaching experience. Their study specifically observed teacher candidates, as part of a mentoring triad, appreciated being welcomed and included in the triad. McKim and Velez (2017) surveyed almost 300 novice classroom teachers across several states and asked questions about the recent student teaching practicum. Their research posited student teaching as the most effective for learning classroom management, teaching strategies, subject-specific teaching, and even leadership. Noting the value of teaching for sustained opportunities, the researchers concluded their article by emphasizing the importance of the student teaching internship site, while also noting beneficial student teaching experiences positively influenced leadership potential in new teachers (McKim & Velez, 2017).

Subsequently, if teacher candidates struggled during their student teaching placement, their tacit knowledge of teaching practice may not be fully developed, or they may have missed opportunities to extend their knowledge. They may, as a result, struggle as novice teachers. Struggling teacher candidates, likewise, may then turn away from leadership opportunities as novices (McKim & Velez, 2017). High quality mentor teachers likely encourage teacher candidates to lead, not only in the classroom which teaching, but also through co-leading an extra-curricular group, through collegial dialogue, or through vicarious experiences, like observing their mentor teacher lead a professional development seminar (McKim & Velez, 2017; Popescu-Mitroi & Mazilescu Crisanta, 2014). In short, teacher candidates learn through teaching practice in the classroom, but also through other experiences offered in their placement.

When Triads Fail

Bullough and Draper, while following year-long teacher candidates, documented the effects of a failed triad. Detailing the complex relationship that exists in a student teaching triad, the researchers described a teacher candidate positioned in the middle of a contentious relationship between their mentor teacher and UFT at odds with each other (2004). Because of assumptions made about expertise by both the mentor teacher and the UFT, the triad never gained ground at the start of the school year and fell apart midway through the year. Ultimately, the teacher candidate, because they were caught in the middle, chose to align with their mentor teacher. Seeing the mentor teacher as a gateway to future teaching practice, the teacher candidate accepted their mentor teacher as a more important expert (Bullough & Draper, 2004). Evaluating the experience, Bullough and Draper argued the triad failed not only because of poor communication, but also because of conditions and expectations guiding the actions of the triad's members. In addition to tense or awkward working conditions, when moments like this happen teacher candidates miss out on opportunities for growth and further professional development (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Bullough and Draper, 2004).

Poor communication in the student teaching triad between mentor teachers and UFTs is a problem recognized among teacher educators. Bullough and Draper (2004) reflected on the missing conversations between members of a student teaching triad in their study. They emphasized that when they discussed this with the teacher candidate, talking more between members of the triad was not seen as a solution. Rather, mediated professional development, (see, e.g., Ambrosetti et al. 2017; Hudson et al., 2013; Mena et al., 2017) at the outset of the student teaching semester, for both the mentors and UFTs, would provide guidance for their respective roles and frame the practices and strengths of each.

Feedback

Teacher candidates were largely receptive to feedback from their mentors, specifically to deepen their understanding of context, to model the practicalities of teaching, and to feel supported during times of difficulty (Goodnough et al., 2009; Spiteri, 2014; van Velzen, et a., 2012). Teacher candidates also want mentors who would help them learn lesson planning and lesson execution, as well as learn about working collaboratively with colleagues. Nevertheless, while teacher candidates valued feedback from their mentor teachers, they preferred their mentors receive guidance from the UFT on completing formal evaluations (Spiteri, 2014). Spiteri's research, using an anonymous questionnaire given to graduating teacher candidates, also learned the teacher candidates were concerned about "bias" in their mentors. They posited mentors should learn objective or impartial methods for assessing teacher candidates (Spiteri, 2014).

When semi-structured mentoring conversations were scheduled between teacher candidates and mentors at regular intervals during the student teaching placement, the teacher candidates were mostly positive about the experience (van Velzen, et al., 2012). The researchers asserted these mentoring conversations were designed to offer practical knowledge while attending to the teacher candidates' learning needs. The study's outcomes, gleaned from multiple data sources, showed the teacher candidates valued these conversations and appreciated not only a focus on their learning needs, but a "deeper" overall focus.

Teacher candidates, as suggested by the abovementioned studies, appear to largely value feedback from their mentor teachers and university supervisors. The teaching triad, as Yee discussed long ago, has merits in preparing teacher candidates for entry into the profession. Yee (1968) argued for a greater focus on the interpersonal nature of the triad, to improve

professionalism and higher quality teachers. At the same time, while Yee argued for "systematic, qualitative changes" (1968, p.108), he did not specify exactly what those might be, instead leaving it open to interpretation. Since this time, Yee and others have offered perspectives on changes to overhaul teacher education, and this topic continues to dominate in the 21st century. My study does not seek to provide one answer, but rather provides a lens into the triad relationship. In this next section, I examine the UFT, another member of the student teaching triad.

University Field Instructor

Like mentors, UFTs are components of the student teaching triad, and like mentors, UFTs engage in complex practices while working with teacher candidates. Research by Cuenca (2010) has been particularly helpful in articulating the challenges of working as a university field instructor. Often fresh from classroom teaching, UFTs are the primary link between the university and the teacher candidate. UFTs regularly observe the teacher candidate while teaching, discuss problems of practice with the teacher candidate, and, if needed, negotiate between the teacher candidate and the mentor teacher. Yet, because their conceptions of good teaching might differ from the mentor or, because they are in the Tteacher candidates' classroom less frequently than the mentor, the potential for conflict is often present (Cuenca, 2010).

Inspired by his own experience moving from the position of classroom teacher to UFT, Cuenca (2010) wrote about the perils of a pedagogy of field-based teacher education that is overly reliant upon the UFT's recent position as classroom teacher. Suggesting that relying on teaching experience is itself not a bad pedagogical move, Cuenca nonetheless argued that this reliance cannot be the only framework used by UFTs. Using his article to articulate how he moved from classroom teacher to thoughtful teacher educator, Cuenca suggested UFTs would

benefit from professional induction and sustained opportunities for exploration of their practice in the field (2010).

While Cuenca authored from "inside" the role of university field instructor, Dinkelman (2012) wrote from the program coordinator's perspective about the work of observing teacher candidates. He wrote of a mystery surrounding the UFT's observation reports, difficult to understand because they vary from program to program. Within programs, Dinkelman (2012) argued, they also vary according to how they are interpreted by the person using them. Dinkelman, citing this material, argued for more careful and rigorous inquiry into a pedagogy of teacher education done collaboratively and in sight of teacher candidates. Researching in front of, and with teacher candidates, he suggested, will not only provide new data, but also reflect an inquiry-based stance that might positively influence teacher education (2012). These studies taken together suggest a strong need for collegial relationships between UFTs and mentor teachers, along with course instructors if applicable, as they seek to support teacher candidates' professional learning (Birmingham, Pineda, and Greenwalt, 2013).

Mentoring

Mentors are everywhere, as noted by Wolitzer (2018). "The first one was a teacher, later on there was another teacher, then a camp counselor, an employer, and finally a writer…Each was kind enough to give me attention, offer advice and time, and take me under her so-called wing" (p. 80). Offering a kindhearted summary, Wolitzer suggested mentors and their "protégés" may share a warm and spontaneous relationship whose importance may not be fully appreciated until years later. Wolitzer (2018) closed her essay suggesting, "We need older people for their experience, and younger ones for their openness, and sometimes vice versa" (p. 84).

A review of research on mentoring, from both the United States and teacher preparation programs in other countries, suggests a lack of consensus describing mentoring as it is conceptualized by teacher educators and researchers (Lai, 2010). Lai argued this could be because writers are attempting to focus on the different dimensions of mentoring. Mentoring in educational settings may include teacher candidates, novice teachers, experienced teachers, or other mentors. Mentoring, additionally, is complex with both social and relational implications (Lai, 2010).

Much of the current literature on mentoring relates to subject area mentoring (Bradbury, 2010; Nilsson & van Driel, 2010), the tools and processes of mentoring (Stanulis et al., 2018), and feedback in teaching placement (Bjørndal, 2020). Mentoring, as related to teacher candidates, is often discussed alongside induction programs and the mentoring of novice teachers. Another characteristic of mentoring is that it is largely relational (Butler & Cuenca, 2012), and yet there exist several perspectives and methodologies for mentoring teacher candidates (Bullough, 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Studies have explored and identified the complexities of mentoring. School-based mentoring of teacher candidates, seen as a vital component of initial teacher education, is argued to be the most important component for Teacher candidates' professional development (Edwards & Protheroe, 2004; Hanson & Moir, 2008; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Richter, Kunter, Lüdtke, Klusmann, Anders, & Baumert, 2013). Mentors are generally recognized, moreover, as helping teacher candidates improve their pedagogical skills and develop higher levels of efficacy as they move into their own classrooms, thus positively impacting teacher candidates' classroom practice (Slick, 1997). Finally, research has long noted mentor teachers positively influencing teacher candidates' classroom management skills and

teaching norms, specifically beginning to think and act like a teacher as well as handle the teaching workload (Ambrosettia, Dekkersa, & Knight, 2017; Hughey, 1997).

Mentoring has, moreover, been recognized as equally important to the growth of the mentor teacher. Recent research noted personal and professional growth of teachers as they talk about their mentoring experiences (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Irby, Lynch, Boswell & Hewitt, 2017). Sharing experiences and likely shaping teacher candidates' early efforts, mentor teachers provide support for their early classroom practice. Mentor teachers' willingness to share their tacit knowledge may lead to new learning. Mentors, argued by Stanulis, et al., (2018), should be more than cheerleaders. The researchers noted when mentors participated in regular mentoring study groups, they discussed specific mentoring practices and may then use these practices during reflective conversations with their teacher candidates. Their mentoring, as a result, tends to be educative.

Educative mentoring, Schwille (1998) argued, is grounded in a belief in good teaching. Rather than mentor teachers merely providing a setting for teacher candidates to practice *the what* of teaching, and providing mostly practical feedback, educative mentors engage teacher candidates in developing their teaching practice through nurturing, coaching, and reflective dialogue (Ambrosettia, Dekkersa, and Knight, 2017; Bradbury, 2010; Hammerness, 2003; Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013; Stanulis et al., 2018). While formal assessment is included in teacher candidates' overall evaluations, it is only one component.

Anecdotal reporting about the level of mentor teacher support prompted Spiteri (2014) to begin a study investigating teacher candidates' perceptions of mentor teacher encouragement, feedback, and overall support. Open-ended questions were anonymously given to 15 teacher candidates studying teaching at a preparation program in Malta. The researchers discovered

mixed results on whether the teacher candidates felt welcomed and supported by their mentors, but they sought to understand more specifically what teacher candidates valued during their placement and what concerned them.

Teacher candidates claimed they were largely receptive to feedback from their mentors, specifically to deepen their understanding of context, to better understand the practicalities of teaching, and to feel supported during times of difficulty (Spiteri, 2014). They wanted a mentor who would help with lesson planning and lesson execution. Spiteri found the teacher candidates valued their mentors' feedback, but they did not feel comfortable being evaluated unless their mentor teachers maintained objectivity and receive guidance on completing formal evaluations (2014).

Participants, notably teacher candidates, offered positive feedback in another study investigating mentors' feedback. Semi-structured mentoring conversations were scheduled between teacher candidates and mentors at regular intervals during the student teaching period. These mentoring conversations were designed to offer practical knowledge while attending to the teacher candidates' learning needs (van Velzen, Volman, Brekelmans, & White, 2012). The study's outcomes, gleaned from multiple data sources, showed the teacher candidates valued these conversations and appreciated not only a focus on their learning needs, but a "deeper" overall focus. The mentors, moreover, appreciated the semi-structured aims of the conversation as well as their focus on meeting the learning needs of the teacher candidates.

Bullough completed a literature review of mentoring and induction practices in four states: New York, Texas, California, and (his home state) Utah. His review, based primarily on induction level mentoring, noted, "Powerful induction programs will encourage human flourishing, the quest to find and sustain a deep happiness in work." (2012, p. 71). While

Bullough's review focused mostly on the induction level, he noted that because of widespread interest in education reform, mentoring throughout all levels of teaching is the "in" thing. For their part, teacher candidates, Bullough discovered, worry about being supported by their mentor teachers and whether their mentor's assessment will affect their ability to be certified (2012). Research on mentoring both teacher candidates and beginning teachers, furthermore, suggests [teacher candidate] leadership while student teaching is a strong predictor of leadership self-efficacy of early career teachers (McKim & Valdez, 2017).

The Intern: Providing Balance to the Triad

The most important member of the triad, teacher candidates' beliefs and perceptions about their student teaching experience provide important implications for teacher education. This is not to say the ideas and opinions of teacher candidates should drive teacher education practice, but rather their interpretations should be part of a shared conversation about the student teaching internship experience.

With much attention in teacher education on the mentor teacher and UFT, it is appropriate to center the experiences of the teacher candidates themselves. That experience is what I propose to do in this study. While no previous research appears to study experience from this perspective, there are studies examining the beliefs and perceptions of teacher candidates as related to their learning needs. It is that research to which I next turn.

The student teaching internship experience is most often the final phase in a teacher education program. Although the exact details and steps-to-completion may vary by preparation program and by country, the exercise of stepping into a working classroom and practicing under an experienced teacher are commonly identified by teacher candidates as most important in their teacher preparation (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hobson, 2002; Ottesen, 2007; Patrick, 2013; Wilson,

Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Critical of the current structure of teacher education, Ball and Cohen (1999, p. 6) argue:

> preservice teacher education offers a weak antidote to the powerful socialization into teaching that occurs in teachers' own prior experience as students. What Dan Lortie (1975) called the 'apprenticeship of observation' is typically more potent than formal teacher education and the lessons of that apprenticeship ordinarily are reinforced by intending teachers' experience in most university courses, student teaching, and professional work.

With knowledge acquisition centered around facts and skills, Ball and Cohen (1999) argue teacher candidates practice and refine their skills following the same approach, along the same lines as classroom teachers, thus limiting opportunities for "substantial professional discourse" (p. 5).

Ball and Cohen, instead, argue for professional education to be grounded in the practice of teaching. Focusing on the relational aspects of teaching, researchers argue, would strengthen teacher candidate learning (Grossman and McDonald, 2008). Teacher candidates, when questioned, identified four types of support they wanted during student teaching. Eager for feedback, they identified expertise in the profession (in their mentors), tact within feedback given, enthusiasm for the work, and integrity as a professional (Popescu & Mazilescu, 2014). One implication from Popescu and Mazilescu's study is that desired support is relational.

Another study from researchers in the Netherlands followed three student teaching triads. With a focus on sharing practical knowledge and an emphasis on teacher candidate learning, participants acknowledged collaborative conversations that also became deeper sooner than traditional mentoring conversations (van Velzen et al., 2012). The teacher candidates recognized

their learning centered many of the conversations and, as reported by van Velzen et al., opportunities for two-way learning were realized by the teacher candidates and their mentors (2012).

Given this data, it is worth investigating how teacher candidates live out their relationships with their mentors. Because they spend weeks and months working closely together, mentor teachers are in a unique position to influence teacher candidates' beliefs and teaching practices. Mentors use their tacit knowledge, while supporting (and sometimes critiquing) teacher candidates. In the moment, teacher candidates may embrace their mentors' critiques and their reflective practice. Perhaps an unanswered question is whether these critical interactions amount to an educative experience, thus something teacher candidates might carry into their own classrooms?

The Urgency Behind Studying Mentors and Mentoring from a Learner-Centered Perspective

Presumably, mentor teachers and university UFTs are essential to the success of the next generation of teachers. And the success of the profession continues to be precarious indeed. With over 50% leaving the field within the first five years and retirements increasing--a trend that appears to be accelerating due to the COVID 19 pandemic--, it is more important than ever to examine, and possibly improve, teacher candidates' support systems (Shwartz & Dori, 2016). Researchers have already noted established, subject-specific research on teaching is rarely shared across disciplines and this, likewise, exists in teacher education (Grossman & McDonald, 2008). Citing this challenge and pushing for change, Grossman and McDonald suggest research on teacher education focus on improving teacher education by sharing questions and ideas, and possibly combining resources across teacher education (2008).

Because of my experience working as a UFT and as a mentor, I am interested in where and how mentor teachers appear in stories from teacher candidates. That is, when stories of learning to teach are told by teacher candidates, where are the mentors? What are they doing? How should we think about their roles? In short, how much does a good mentor really matter--and is revealed by the stories interns tell about their student teaching? Research literature since the time of Yee seems to have minimized the importance of the student teaching triad. In this study, I test that assumption.

UFTs and mentor teachers are essential voices in student teaching enactment. They bring to student teaching conversations their tacit knowledge of classroom teaching and of children at work to mentoring conversations. Examining the research surrounding these members of the student teaching triad provides knowledge about those influencing *experiential knowledge*, or experience gained through practice teaching (Kolb, 1984). These conversations are so important that Bullough (2012) suggested research on teacher education position mentors as the next big "in thing" for study.

Indeed, shortly after Bullough's article was published, the merger of NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) and TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) into the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) was completed. The new accreditation body swiftly demanded "urgent changes in educator preparation" (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation Commission on Standards and Performance Report, 2013, p. 5). Since the merger was completed, CAEP has put forward standards that are focused on outcomes and evidence--something of a sea change for the profession. In turn, teacher preparation programs have been hard at work to meet the standards. My own work certainly supports the idea of reorienting teacher preparation around clinical

preparation--yet I do so with an open and curious stance that questions what truly matters in clinical experiences.

Chapter Summary

The research and discussion provided in this chapter examine the individual components of the teacher candidate triad, and along with my work in teacher education, influenced my decision to investigate student teaching through the eyes of teacher candidates. This chapter began with an examination of the *student teaching triad*, a term first proposed by Yee in 1968. Yee correctly noted each component of the triad was critical to the success of the other. Together, he argued, the triad becomes a strong team that is an integral part of the teacher education program. Yee recognized there were challenges inherent in this method, but he encouraged teacher preparation programs to build from the methods they already used, and make "systematic, qualitative changes" (1968, p. 108).

The remaining sections of the chapter discussed research focused on practiced members of the triad, mentors, and UFTs, and concluded by examining the needs of teacher candidates. While teacher candidates are but one component of the triad, they are the reason for the triad. Because of that, and because they are the next generation of teachers, their voice matters.

Chapter III

Methodology

In Chapter III, I first present the epistemology underlying this study and my role as researcher. I next share the research methodology and rationale used for this study, along with the plan for research. To understand the plan for research, this section also discusses the research participants and instrumentation of the study, along with data collection and steps for phenomenological data analysis.

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the lived experience of four elementary-level teacher candidates and explore how their mentor teachers appeared in their stories of learning to teach. Since "learning to teach" is the experience in question, using phenomenology as the research methodology provides an understanding of the participants' individual and shared experiences. Van Manen noted that Gadamer credited the term, *lifeworld* (German: *lebenswelt*), to Edmund Husserl and meant "the world we live in the natural attitude of everyday life" (p. 133). A review of relevant scholarship in Chapter II explored research on the relational aspects of mentoring and how those relationships help us understand the experience of learning to teach. Phenomenology, with its focus on lived experience, is perfect for understanding what role--if any--mentors play in those powerful moments of learning to teach (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, (2001).

Epistemology

Because my professional experiences were shaped by my work teaching in Montessori schools as well as my participation in *training*[3], and my certification, as a Montessori educator, this dissertation is grounded in the research and practice of the Montessori Method. Specifically,

[3] Training, as a noun, commonly describes learning how to teach the Montessori Method. This terminology is traditional in the Montessori community.

this is a teaching and learning method founded by Dr. Maria Montessori at the turn of the 20th century. Although researchers traditionally set aside their personal beliefs to remain open to the lived experience, phenomenological researchers embrace these beliefs as foundational for further learning. In this way, for me, the Montessori Method is not merely a belief; it is, rather, *a way of living* shaping my personal life and professional experiences.

The Montessori Method is not something to strictly bracket, or set aside, because it also anchors my growth and learning. At the same time, Montessori teachers, often called directresses, learn throughout their training the importance of careful observation (Gordon, 2007). Observation, in which teachers step back and observe, without judgement, becomes an important diagnostic tool for the Montessori teacher. It is, in my own estimation, a connection between the careful methods used in Montessori to observe children as they learn and grow and phenomenology. The strength of this approach is just as humans enact, and examine, how it is to be in the world (Vagle, 2014), Montessori teachers observe how children engage with the Montessori materials, their peers, and their environment.

Design and Rationale

Van Manen (1990) suggested interviews, in hermeneutic phenomenological human science, perform a particular purpose. He posited interviewing, indeed, as a means to gather life material that may provide a richer and deeper understanding of a phenomenon. For this study, interviewing was chosen to better understand the phenomenon of being mentored. Attention on teacher candidates' success is often focus on how they are mentored by their host, or mentor, teacher. It is the mentor teacher's classroom, and teacher candidates work in it anywhere from six weeks to several months. Mentor teachers witness teacher candidates' growth and often are there to counsel them through challenges. Questioning the essential nature of being mentored,

when teacher candidates, by necessity, work closely with their mentor teacher, grounded this project. Van Manen argued "a phenomenological concern has a twofold character: a preoccupation with both the concreteness as well as the essential nature of a lived experience" (1990, p. 39-40.)

How is learning to teach experienced by teacher candidates and what roles do their mentors play in the seminal experiences that make up this process? When teacher candidates are asked to describe their experience of learning to teach, their responses may possibly shed light on their mentors' actions. This may include statements made by, or narrative descriptions of time spent with, their mentor. Turning to the nature of learning to teach may shed new light on the phenomenon of mentoring (Van Manen, 1990).

The interview, in hermeneutic phenomenological research, has a specific purpose, as argued by Van Manen (1990). First, it provides a method for building a conversational rapport with the participant(s). Second, the interview is a means "for gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for richer and deeper understandings of the phenomenon" (p. 66). Thus, it was essential to stay close to the experience lived by the teacher candidates. I started the initial interview with a broad, open-ended question about the experience: *Please describe for me a time in your student teaching experience when you felt like you really learned something about teaching*. This open prompt avoids leading participants to speak about what the researcher is interested in. Instead, it asks about experience broadly, and allows the researchers to see what stands out for the participant. It centers the participants' voices. Remaining open throughout the interview to collecting rich and detailed material, I sometimes used follow-up prompts to stay quite close to the experience.

Researcher and Participants

The teacher candidates interviewed were fifth-year student teaching interns from Michigan State University (MSU) in Lansing, Michigan. I worked with them during the 2016-2017 school year as their UFT. However, they were not approached for this study until they completed student teaching. The participants were all white and ranged in age from early to late 20s. Three were females and one was male. Two hold bachelor's degrees in elementary education and language arts while two hold bachelor's degrees in elementary education and social studies. One minored in math and one minored in Early Childhood Education. Finally, two were members of Urban Educators Cohort Program (UECP)[4]. Following is a brief description of each participant.

Aylin majored in language arts and was a member of the UECP. She completed her student teaching in a fifth-grade classroom at a Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) school. Aylin grew up in Haslett, a suburb of Lansing. Michigan. She loves traveling, animals, and danced throughout her K-12 school years. During college, she worked in an afterschool program and taught dance classes to young children. Aylin formed a close bond with her mentor teacher during her student teaching internship. She was technology savvy, friendly, but also shy and reserved. She listened and took notes during meetings but did not usually ask questions. She was more likely to email her questions later or bring them up when we met one-on-one. Aylin initially struggled with organization, having relied on a digital calendar throughout her undergraduate program. As a result, we went over how to effectively use a paper calendar system to track her professional responsibilities, graduate school coursework, and volunteering/personal

[4] The UECP program at Michigan State University is a cohort program with specialized classes and a focus on teaching in urban school settings.

interests. After completing student teaching, Aylin immediately started a master's program in education. She also took a teaching position at the school where she completed student teaching.

Ben, another participant in this study, student taught with Aylin at the same school and in the same grade. He held a bachelor's degree in social studies. Married with one son, Ben grew up in Lansing, attended Lansing Public Schools, and planned to send his son to the same district. He stated shortly after we met that he was committed to learning and teaching in the district from which he graduated. Ben did, in fact, take a long-term substituting position for Lansing Public Schools and a few weeks later, accepted a teaching position for a primary grade classroom in the same district.

Ben, the oldest of the four teacher candidates, had worked at the MSU Dairy Farm, volunteered as a basketball coach, Boy Scouts leader, Sunday school teacher, and was a Certified Nurse's Assistant. Admitting he pursued a teaching career later than others; he felt his volunteering, work, and professional experiences were valuable to his teaching goals. During his student teaching internship, Ben worked on occasion as a disc jockey, even playing music for an event at the school. He wanted to teach his students to embrace both classroom learning and community involvement.

Heather was from a small town of approximately 9,000 people just outside of Ann Arbor. A member of the UECP, she completed her bachelor's degree in social studies and math. Heather student taught in a fifth-grade classroom at a STEM focus school. The two summers prior to student teaching, she completed summer school urban immersion placements in Detroit, Michigan. Heather was constantly smiling and laughed easily with her students, often going outside at recess to join them for a few minutes on the playground. She loved crafting and volunteering and she often spoke about her family during our debriefing conversations. After

completing her student teaching internship, Heather took a position teaching for Lansing Public Schools.

Lisa completed her student teaching in a second-grade classroom and majored in language arts and early childhood education. Prior to student teaching, she worked as a teaching assistant for a required child development course, as well as completed a semester-long preschool teaching internship at the Michigan State University's Child Development Center. Lisa had experience in childcare, specifically working with special needs children. Lisa also volunteered with Michigan Special Olympics, coached softball for students with special needs, and spent her summers working at a camp for children with special needs. After she graduated from MSU, Lisa took a position at a parochial school, teaching preschool and young five students. Lisa had a habit, while teaching, of looking over her glasses at students who needed reminders to focus.

Because I worked with these teacher candidates as their UFT, I met with each multiple times during the year. I had observed their teaching, met with them to discuss teaching strategies, and counseled them through difficult moments in the classroom. Van Manen suggested participation is the best way to enter a person's life world (1990). Keeping this in mind, while I observed their work and met with them throughout the year, I was connected to the participants' lifeworlds--their emotions, frustrations, anxieties, joys, and triumphs. But when I came to them as a researcher, that time had passed, and a more reflective relationship was possible. Therefore, I not only worked with these teacher candidates as a teacher educator, but as a researcher, I also strove to maintain a reflective outlook about my prior work with them. Thus, knowing my participants provided both the intimacy and reflectivity that Van Manen (1990) has argued is important while gathering lived experiential accounts.

The Teacher Candidate's experiences were also influenced by their mentor teachers. Although they were not the primary participants of this study, I also formed relationships with the mentor teachers. Through my work as a UFT, I had known two of the mentor teachers for two years each at the time of the interviews. The other two mentor teachers were new to me when they started working with the participants in this study. The mentor teachers and I, along with other mentor teachers and UFTs at MSU, met on occasion in mentor teacher study groups. Working in these groups afforded me additional context for the interpretive work that I needed to do to complete this study.

Student Teaching Site

The research setting was a grade 4-6, urban, English Language Learners (ELL), multicultural, elementary STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focus school in Lansing, Michigan. Walking through the school building, visitors likely notice signs displayed in multiple languages. The school recently transitioned from a traditional elementary K-5 building to its current grade configuration and topical focus, with all teachers interviewing or re-interviewing for positions. 100% of the school's students participate in the free or reduced program, but 78% are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Data Gathering

The primary instrument used for this project was the phenomenological interview. Interviews, Van Manen (2014) suggested, serve as the foundation for data gathering, where the data is the story or anecdote shared by the interviewee. Rather than analyzing the phenomenon *during* the interview, researchers gather interviews to provide "pre-reflective experiential accounts" leading to a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (p. 314).

After my initial request of the interviewees, in which I asked if I might interview them about their student teaching experience, I set up meetings according to their availability. Two of the meetings took place in the interviewee's classroom. In one, I organized classroom books after the interview concluded. Two of the other meetings took place in restaurants over lunch or coffee. In each case, I brought along my iPhone and used the "Voice Memo" application to record the interviews. After the meetings were finished, I uploaded them immediately to a secure server. Once the interviews transferred successfully, they were deleted from both the iPhone and iCloud storage.

Taking advice from Vagle (2014), I had a notebook available, but I did not focus on notetaking. I did, as he suggested, write down phrases or words I found intriguing, but in order to stay "open and immediate" I used these mostly to steer the conversation (p. 80). I transcribed all interviews using NVivo. These transcriptions provided narrative material illuminative of their experience of learning to teach. In addition to interviews, I used the teacher candidates' lesson plans (from student teaching), pertinent emails to and from me, my own notes from teaching observations, plus summaries and journal entries from meetings with the mentor teachers.

Data Analysis

All analysis is phenomenological in orientation. Following transcription, completed transcripts were read in their entirety to consider their significance, clarifying a "holistic meaningful reference" (Todres & Galvin, 2012, p. 59). Audio recording provided the opportunity to listen to the teacher candidates' experiences as many times as necessary, in which I sought meaning from them, and documented emerging themes. Across all interviews, themes were noted and documented (Van Manen, 1990).

The work of uncovering themes after the interviews, versus the presuppositions about the lived experience of being mentored, is different. The second is much simpler because it is pre-reflective, whereas the first is multi-faceted, involving examination, clarifying, re-examining, and making explicit (Van Manen, 1990). The work of phenomenological research suggests analysis is emergent because as data is gathered, examined, and re-examined, it changes (Vagle, 2014).

As mentioned previously, all interviews were recorded to allow for re-examination. I did this multiple times with each interview when traveling for a few hours by car. Surrounding myself with the interviewees' stories, with no other way of interaction, illuminated important aspects of the interviews, such as voice inflection, changes to the tone of speech, and underlying emotions. For example, one participant's voice shook when they described a moment in their story. Transcription, in addition, retained the authenticity of the participants' voices when they used repeated phrases, stumbled over description, or questioned interactions.

Van Manen (1990) suggested, "theme gives control and order to our research and writing" (p. 79). In this study, theme intimated particular understandings of learning to teach, or a discovery of something meaningful about the relationships, supports, and resources viewed as meaningful in learning how to teach. As noted above, I used these stories of learning to teach to better understand the role of the mentor (Van Manen, 1990). Espousing Van Manen's (1990) metaphor of themes as knots in the web of experience, with this study, I sought to find the *mentoring knots* in the learning to teach experience.

I personally envision the web of experience as a rope. Using this metaphor, not unlike *Knots on a Counting Rope* (1966) by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault, individuals have their own unique life rope. Teacher candidates' life ropes, specifically during their time student

teaching are likely full of knots—of all sizes. The activity of student teaching often takes place during, and proceeds, many significant life changes, including graduating from college, moving, and/or beginning a career. With this project, I sought to identify when the mentors may have smoothed or knotted teacher candidates' life ropes--all to see the role of the mentor in the experiences of learning to teach.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure both validity and reliability were maintained throughout the research and writing process, I followed procedures set forth by Creswell and Poth (2018). Prior to beginning this dissertation research, I established a relationship with the each of the participants. I saw them in their classrooms several times while they completed their student teaching internship, thus providing me with a better perspective of their context and situation while also adding depth to the data analysis (p. 262). While participant interviews were the primary source of data, I also used other data sources including emails, lesson plans, and debriefing notes from the teacher candidates, interviews and study sessions with the mentor teachers, and my own lesson observation notes. I, furthermore, utilized member checking, a process described as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in which data is shared with the participants to establish accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

Credibility and accuracy were further established through peer review. Iterations of this dissertation were shared with both my advisor and a writing professional who is a neutral observer. This neutral person has no direct knowledge of the participants or their student teaching setting. Feedback was used to establish both readability of the manuscript and writing coherence (Creswell, 2009), with an understanding that writing is, at its core, a developmental and on-going process. Through meetings and peer review with my advisor, I made modifications

to the manuscript while also preserving the authenticity of the original interviews. My advisor provided, moreover, a seasoned researcher's perspective.

Researcher positionality was mentioned in earlier chapters of this dissertation, with an eye toward recognizing the past experiences that precipitated this project. This research project, namely, was inspired by my own experiences as, first, an elementary teacher candidate, later as a Montessori teaching intern, and finally as a mentor teacher to teacher candidates. I have, however, done my best to confront my own positionality. As described by Vagle (2014), phenomenological researchers cannot bracket interpretations, but can and must bracket "pre-suppositions as one interprets" (p. 59).

I have, however, done my best to employ Van Manen's interpretation of bracketing. As described by Vagle (2014), Van Manen noted researchers are not bracketing interpretations, but bracketing "pre-suppositions as one interprets" (p. 59).

Rich descriptions were used throughout this dissertation. These accounts, as argued by Van Manen (1990), were kept close to the original question that inspired this project. I stayed close to the experiences as described during interviews, to "transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 36).

Ethics

"One of the ways of building trust in social science research is through explaining the steps in making the study rigorous" (Rambaree, 2007). While the teacher candidates discussed how they *lived* in the experience of student teaching, this study respected the tenets of qualitative research. This chapter discusses the systematic approach to this study. First, the teacher candidates interviewed for this study were recruited after they had completed their student teaching and been recommended for certification. I explained my interest in learning more from

them and stated participation was voluntary. The teacher candidates that agreed to be interviewed received a participation consent form and their mentor teachers, because they were cited and discussed, also received participation consent forms. To respect confidentiality, the participants' names were removed, and they were assigned pseudonyms. I also removed the mentor teachers' names.

Each of the interviews were recorded and all data saved to a password-protected file on my computer. After the interviews were transcribed, I sent them to the participants and asked them to read through the interview and respond with corrections or explanation. One returned their transcript with corrections because they felt they had not given enough detail in the response. Another participant returned their transcript with an answer filled in that I had not been able to hear because of noise interference in the recording. I saved these emails in the same password-protected file. The other two participants did not make corrections and responded with a quick email that they had read the file, and all looked good.

Despite their different levels of engagement, when I asked each of the participants if they would consent to being interviewed for my study they consented enthusiastically. Each of the conversations went longer than planned and the participants were mostly enthusiastic in their responses. One specifically mentioned she was excited her student teaching experience might help others.

Chapter Summary

In chapter three, I shared the methodology used for this dissertation project. Grounding my research in the epistemology of the Montessori Method, a theory in which I trained for years and then supported my own teaching, I used phenomenology to examine the lived experience of "being mentored." I interviewed four teacher candidates for this project, all graduate level

teacher candidates in a yearlong placement. Because I worked with each of them as their university field supervisor, I saw them teach, supported them in post-observation meetings, and I had also worked with their mentor teachers. I further discussed, in this chapter, data collection and analysis, ethics and researcher bias, and how I addressed validity and reliability.

Chapter IV

Lived Experience of Elementary-Level Teacher Candidates

This phenomenological study explores the lived experience of four elementary level teacher candidates from urban schools during a nine-month student teaching internship. Phenomenology provides researchers a means for understanding teacher candidates' experiences during their student teaching. Teacher education research often focuses on teacher candidate learning in content-area methods classes, while likewise approaching the student teaching experience with a content-area lens. This lens is, no doubt, important, as it provides perspective on teacher candidates' learning in preparation for classroom teaching. While subject area knowledge is necessary, this focus may have moved research away from much of the relational aspects of teaching.

Van Manen (1990) suggested researchers, in their eagerness to use theories and frameworks to make sense of the lived experience, may forget human beings, themselves, bring forth frameworks and ideas, rather than the opposite. In this way, teacher candidates' voices are too often absent from a significant portion of the literature on the student teaching experience.

This chapter provides key findings, obtained from four teacher candidates, shortly after they completed their student teaching.

This study is anchored in the lifeworld of the student teaching internship by observing student teaching through the lens of the teacher candidates themselves. Each of the four teacher candidates participated in interviews in which they described a time in their student teaching experience when they felt they learned something about teaching. While they were each silent for a moment or two after I asked the initial question, they also had little-to-no trouble identifying their moment.

Ben's Story of Being Humbled

Ben immediately identified a time he taught a math lesson, while being observed by both his mentor teacher, and me, his UFT.

> The time I really learned something about teaching was the…the lesson I bombed. Cause like, it was just crap. I remember feeling like…they didn't learn anything. And so, I saw for the first time every single thing that I wasn't supposed to do when I'm trying to teach math.

As Ben talked about the failed lesson, his feelings that day, and what he learned from the experience, he was sometimes emotional. "I needed to see that, I needed to see that I sucked. Because I wouldn't have gotten any better. If that lesson would have went super smooth, you know what I mean." Ben's reflection of himself and his teaching was occasionally harsh, but he did not believe his failed lesson was a failed moment in learning about teaching. As he pointed out to me with a slightly shaky voice, "It was good to be humbled. It really helped me."

Ben's lesson was taught in December. He, like all the teacher candidates at Michigan State University and for this study, was in a year-long student teaching internship. Ben started working with his mentor teacher in August, assisting with classroom set up and attending some district and building professional development. He completed his assignment at the end of April the following year. When this lesson took place, Ben had been student teaching for several weeks. Although he immediately laughed in answer to the question, Ben's description of the experience was detailed and his analysis passionate. He recognized the significance of his failure and its path to new learning.

Some of Ben's new learning in this moment was admitting he did not fully understand what he was teaching. Prior to that day's lesson, Ben had observed his mentor teacher during

math instruction, and he helped students during instruction. He confessed; however, math was not his best subject. Ben thought he knew, well enough, the process of the mathematical operation he taught that day, which was making equivalent fractions with manipulatives. While he knew the rote steps, he did not know *why* the operations happened the way they did. “I didn't have a full-enough grasp on the subject to teach it. I knew how to do it, and it was the first time I learned that just because I learned how to do it, didn't mean I knew how to teach it.”

In other words, during the lesson, Ben realized not only had he not prepared well, but he was also unsure of the instructional moves needed for teaching. He stated, “I knew it was going south when I had explained all the things I knew how to teach them about it. I still had blank stares and didn't know where to go from that point.” Ben said he tried to use the manipulatives to salvage his lesson, but he also failed to use these correctly. Ben highlighted a distinction he made when he reflected on this lesson. He realized that while he attempted to teach his students about fractions, he was not teaching them an *understanding* of the *concept* of fractions. Reflecting on this difference, Ben emphasized, pushed him to learn more about the subject and how to teach it.

Ben described how he felt as the lesson fell apart, while standing in front of his class. “My teaching got, for the rest of that lesson, apologetic. It just, you know, my confidence left.” Ben stated, furthermore, that when the lesson failed, it was not because his students were not putting forth appropriate effort—it was because he had failed in his preparation.

Ben recognized his own lack of preparation and claimed he let down his students. He noted his thoughts turned negative after the challenging lesson. The rest of the school day, since the lesson was in the morning, was rough. “I had to...I had to get through the rest of the day. And the whole day, like, I felt like...they weren't...I felt like my kids were like, ‘You suck, dude. What was that?’”

Ben felt this experience provided, especially, a moment he needed to remember throughout his career. He mentioned he talked to himself on the drive home, thinking, “you want to do this for a living? That was part of the humbling experience. You want to do this for a living, and you turn in that garbage? How many times have you said to other people we need higher quality teachers? That wasn't higher quality.” Ben went on to state, furthermore, being the authority in the classroom did not mean students were learning from him.

Just as his students needed help learning, so did Ben. He admitted before this day he would often “wing it.” After that day, he pushed himself “to further understand [his] craft.” Ben mentioned, more than once, he learned a lot from the failed lesson: “it allowed me to learn, it allowed me to learn a lot more. I let more in; you know. It was good.”

Preparation is key to successful instruction, Ben argued. His experience of failing in front of his students, and as discussed earlier, doubting himself, led to Ben changing how he approached instruction. Ben became more thoughtful in his preparation: he became “uber prepared.” He stated, emphatically, “I really realized, without preparation, you cannot teach. Like it’s impossible. Like it’s impossible to teach effectively.” Ben admitted, more than once, he did not know enough about the specific mathematics content to teach it effectively. He also stated he had not done enough preparation, relying instead on observations of his mentor teacher’s strong teaching every day.

Ben claimed he did not see his mentor teacher prepare lessons as much as he, himself, had to during student teaching. He admitted he focused on instruction, without considering the years of practice and his mentor’s own struggles as a novice teacher. “I was seeing my mentor teach and he would just, you know, crush things, and it was like, he had been prepping for 20 years because he teaches every year.”

Ben's mentor had 20 years of teaching experience, mostly in upper elementary, the year he was Ben's mentor teacher. After his failed lesson, Ben not only debriefed with me about the struggles he had teaching the content, but he also met with his mentor teacher to discuss what happened and next steps. "My mentor was always really good about not hammering you. You know he was teaching you, but [that day] he was like, right off the bat, he was like, 'that was rough,' and I was like, 'I know!' I felt awful."

Experiencing a failed lesson was good for him, Ben argued, and needed to happen. He praised the conversations he had with his mentor teacher, after this "letdown," because not only was he more open to ideas, but also his mentor teacher "always gave me legitimate insight. If it was a dumb idea, he told me so and told me why. Then, he would ask, 'What if you take that idea and do this instead?" Just as important, Ben's mentor teacher helped him understand the grade level. "He would give me a little insight into the fifth-grade mind. He'd say, 'That's not going to work because of this and this. This will probably happen. They do not do well with that.'"

Not only did Ben's mentor teacher unpack and demonstrate how to plan a math lesson, but he also taught the next few math lessons. The co-planning was detailed, affording Ben opportunities to listen to his mentor teacher with renewed focus. Ben stated this helped him see his mentor's thinking in action and understand how the planning process informed teaching. Ben then closely observed his mentor's mathematics instruction. If Ben had questions, he clarified them immediately.

After all this, I asked Ben when he started teaching math again. He suggested his confidence was shaky and when it was time to, once again, teach math, his mentor not only gave him a locker room pep talk, but he also carefully considered which lesson Ben would take. Ben

commented, “I needed to get a win,” and his mentor picked the introductory lesson for a new unit of fractions.

“I studied the hell out of that lesson. I came back and I taught an amazing lesson. He was like, ‘that’s the best lesson you’ve taught. You have to keep doing it that way.’” Ben’s mentor, helping Ben understand how teachers learn, advised that the first two or three times teaching a particular lesson would be most challenging but, with practice and experience, lesson planning and instruction would become easier.

Ben thought he understood lesson planning when he started student teaching. After the difficulties of his failed lesson, however, he started writing lessons with more care and attention. Not only did he send them to me on time for observations, which he struggled to do before his failed lesson, but he also sent them to his mentor teacher for feedback. His mentor teacher provided honest feedback with constructive criticism, corrections, and praise—all which Ben felt helped him improve his lesson planning.

Ben described how he learned from his mentor teacher’s feedback. He said his mentor teacher returned his lesson plans full of questions and comments such as: “What are they going to do here? What are they going to do next? That's not going to take enough time." Ben’s mentor teacher also followed through on his feedback, making sure Ben responded to, or revised, his plans. Near the end of Ben’s student teaching internship, he continued sending math lesson plans to his mentor teacher (not plans in the other subjects, such as literacy). Since Ben recognized he was weaker in math, he continued asking for and receiving feedback. His mentor affirmed once again, “because you don't know it as well or because you're not as comfortable with math, you need to know it...not just better than them, but four times better than them.”

In helping Ben develop good lesson plans, Ben's mentor teacher used the gradual release of responsibility method. Ben explained how he did this. Occasionally, his mentor would say something like:

> I'm not going to give you input on this one. I'm not going to. You do what you think is going to teach them the best. So, I was like, all right. And I did. And then afterwards if there was something, he'd be like, "Okay. This is what I would have done here." And so he'd do it that way. But that allowed me to see for myself why some things don't work. That sticks in your brain a little better, I think.

In this way, Ben learned experience can itself teach—if approached with the right frame of mind.

That said, Ben's mentor continued to coach where Ben needed—both in the planning and reflecting stages of the instructional cycle. According to Ben, his mentor took his calls no matter the time or day, and he promptly returned missed calls. "My mentor realized right off the bat that when I gotta talk about something or get ideas, I have to *talk* to somebody. I have to hear the inflection in the voice. I have to hear all that stuff. I called my mentor more than a desperate girlfriend. I called him all the time." Ben preferred phone calls to talk through his ideas. "I would call that dude all the time. I would call that dude and he would always pick up. He'd always listen to everything I had to say. He would never rush me off the phone."

As Ben gained confidence in his teaching, he continued to call his mentor teacher. His mentor mentioned, however, in an end-of-semester meeting, that "when he calls now, I ask a few questions and he does most of the talking. He is more confident preparing his lessons." While Ben admitted he leaned on his mentor teacher a lot, especially after his failed lesson, he also said his mentor teacher would push back and tell him, "This is your thing. You need to try some things out."

Even when Ben finished student teaching and no longer worked with his mentor teacher every day, they continued speaking on occasion. The next school year, he also met his mentor teacher's new teacher candidate. When they met, Ben told the new teacher candidate, "Dude, you have no idea how lucky you are. No idea (laughs)." He continued: "if he tells you to do something, do it. Don't take him for granted at all. You can't learn too much!".

Analyzing Ben's Experience

In the last section, we heard Ben's story of learning to teach through failure. In this section, we step back from the specifics of that story in order to read it more hermeneutically. Following the phenomenological method, in this section I posit how, where, and when the mentor and mentoring appear in Ben's story. That is, rather than asking Ben or his mentor direct questions about how they work, I use Ben's story to approach the question of the meaning of mentoring with fresh eyes.

Ben mentioned immediately I observed his teaching the day of his failed lesson, stating his mentor teacher was also there. Along with his student teaching peers, Ben had been asked to plan and teach at least one math lesson as a formal observation. Indeed, it was the notion of being observed that was most salient for Ben when discussing the experience. The lesson was early in his "full time" student teaching period. While he had taught language arts and math prior to this day's lesson, he had not taught math for as long and the lesson introduced a new concept. Ben also said he was more at ease teaching reading and writing and less secure about his overall mathematics knowledge.

Ben's teaching, prior to this challenging lesson, highlighted his enjoyment of being in the classroom, along with a higher-than-average level of morale. Older than most of his student teaching colleagues, Ben's maturity presented itself in how he handled many of the challenges

inherent in student teaching, such as the hectic workload. Prior to this lesson, Ben listened to his mentor teacher describe problems of practice, he watched his mentor teach and emulated many of his actions, and he asked questions about classroom management. He listened as his mentor, and I, made recommendations and challenged his assumptions. Ben, overall, confidently embraced his student teaching experience.

Ben's mentor was never far from the description of the time Ben learned the most about teaching. Listening to Ben talk about the lesson, and his experience, brings forth an understanding that Ben, prior to that day, listened patiently to his mentor's feedback and ideas. Ben's confidence in teaching was high enough, however, that he was frustrated with the length of MSU's student teaching internship. He mentioned during his interview, "I was doin' just awesome. I was nailing lessons and stuff like that…I don't see why we gotta do this a whole year. You know what I mean?" I was like, "what's the big deal here?'" Ben's disposition, after he struggled through a lesson he not only did not fully understand, but also had not fully prepped, opened fully to greater learning and understanding.

Ben's mentor teacher, believing Ben was weakest teaching math, remained in the classroom throughout Ben's lesson. While he occasionally left the room when Ben was teaching, he chose to remain that day. Having worked with Ben's mentor teacher for one year prior to Ben's student teaching year, I knew he usually took notes during observations, and he also did the day of Ben's lesson. He used these notes to talk with me and with his teacher candidate. It was my habit to copy my notes and give the originals to my teacher candidates. I did this the day of Ben's lesson. Ben's mentor teacher also made copies of his notes and used these to discuss aspects of the lesson, such as areas of strength and weakness and where he would change instruction.

Because I have copies of notes from that time, I know Ben's mentor and I connected during a break later in the school day. We both had copies of Ben's lesson plan and we briefly discussed how Ben's planning, or lack thereof, factored into the challenges Ben experienced that day. Moreover, looking back at my review of Ben's lesson plan, I noted where Ben made incorrect assumptions about the lesson, including planned illustrations. My review would have been returned to Ben prior to the day's lesson so he could make changes, but it was also Ben's habit to submit his lesson plans late.

During Ben's lesson, his mentor teacher stayed mostly to the side or in the back of the classroom, as was his habit during observations. That day, like all days, he occasionally stepped in to whisper to, or help, a student. Because of its STEM approach, the school was popular among families in the Lansing School District. Its students spoke several languages and Ben's mentor teacher, while Ben was leading instruction, assisted the newest English Language Learning (ELL) students, some of whom spoke little to no English. He took over, furthermore, when he understood Ben, no longer teaching the correct content, was confused and unsure about instruction. At times, during other lessons, he would stand or sit by me for a few minutes and discuss his observations. We did not, however, talk much that day.

Robin Sharma said, "Mastery begins with humility." Ben recognized, after that day's lesson, he had more to learn about teaching. Mastery would take both practice and time. Humbled by the experience, Ben opened himself to learning. Because his mentor temporarily took over math instruction for the next few days, he attended to listening and learning. Ben's mentor focused specifically on planning for math instruction, as if Ben did not enjoy teaching math, which Ben did not.

During these planning sessions, Ben's mentor emphasized the necessity of teachers' strong tacit knowledge. He argued teachers needed to know content "four times better than them [students]," because teachers should anticipate all the ways students may approach their problem solving. Using a co-planning framework, Ben's mentor demonstrated, step-by-step, the phases of planning a math lesson, beginning with recognizing what he, as the teacher, needed to understand about the concept.

Anticipating steps students may use to solve a math problem required Ben to analyze "every problem you think a kid would have with it" so he could answer questions and predict where they might make mistakes. Ben's mentor, during co-planning, showed Ben how he did this. From the students who often struggle to understand new math content, to the students who develop interesting steps in the problem-solving framework, to the students who do not like to show their work, Ben's mentor demonstrated preparing for these questions and more. Recognizing how valuable it was to plan this way, Ben himself stated, "I wouldn't have done that if not for that time in my student teaching. I wouldn't have, because I wouldn't have thought that way. I wouldn't have thought of every way to approach a problem in math."

Ben's mentor, moreover, talked through all stages of planning math lessons. He unpacked, for Ben, how to use the district's math curriculum and its teacher's edition. Recognizing a gap between the district's new mathematics curriculum and their students' readiness, Ben's mentor teacher assigned Ben to work with him and write a gap unit. This small unit demonstrated, for Ben, planning and teaching when students need additional resources.

Ben's mentor teacher, moreover, demonstrated for Ben all the ways he needed to prepare, specifically anticipating students' questions during and after lessons, while also differentiating during the lessons. He helped Ben understand timing, and scheduling all the steps of a lesson, so

Ben did not finish too soon or take too long. Finally, he told him how to be ready for unexpected challenges in the lesson.

Ben's mentor was present, in the classroom and with constructive feedback, both before and after Ben's failed lesson. He interjected in lessons if corrections or clarification was needed and challenged Ben to be actively engaged throughout the day. He provided Ben with verbal and written feedback, and he made himself available whenever Ben needed to talk through ideas. Ben, however, was more receptive to his mentor's feedback after he failed in front of his students, his mentor, and me. Because he failed, Ben also received more detailed co-planning sessions with his mentor teacher. These co-planning sessions reviewed all parts of planning and preparing math lessons. They focused, furthermore, on preparing lessons when Ben, who admitted not liking math as much, needed to deeply understand the concept in order to teach it.

Aylin Learned to Trust her Vision While Part of a Collaborative Teaching Team

Aylin's story is centered, like Ben's, in the relationship she had with her mentor teacher. Although the setting is different, Aylin's story shows how she learned from her mentor teacher's collaborative efforts, as well as the advice and reassurance she gained when she presented a problem of practice. Aylin, preparing for a social studies unit and lesson, wanted to diverge from a lesson plan created by a member of her teaching team. This lesson would take her students in a different direction for two to three days, before they were again doing the same work as their peers. Turning to her mentor teacher for advice, Aylin gained confidence in her ideas while learning from her mentor teacher's skill at collaboration.

Aylin's idea centered on her students taking a more active role in their learning. She noted while students would do what was asked of them, she wanted them to do more. In her interview, Aylin shared her initial concern.

> I was really struggling with the idea of not letting the students create the script themselves and really digging into the research to see if they could pull out the main parts and recreate what was happening. They [students] could be much more creative…they like to come up with things on their own. Handing them something, they're not going to get as invested in it and really understand the content, I felt, as much.

Rather than give her students completed reader's theater scripts, Aylin wanted her class to write their own scripts. She told me she not only knew her students could do more, she also worried that handing students completed scripts would "almost stop the learning process."

This specific lesson was part of a larger unit and written by another teacher candidate in her same grade level. Aylin worked daily with the lesson writer and recognized his personality was more outgoing and brasher than hers. She worried teaching the lesson, using her own plans, would cause a problem amongst her peers. Aylin approached the teaching team of three other teachers, two of whom were fellow teacher candidates, after talking with her mentor teacher and thinking about her idea for a few days. Aylin shared her reluctance to talk with her team, "I wasn't really big on sharing my own ideas because I always questioned them. I was just like, 'I don't know if they're going to be good, or if that's how they should be.'"

Aylin was full of self-doubt when she considered breaking from her teaching team and teaching a lesson differently. Aylin said, "That's also something I'm very...I'm thinking all the time and how people perceive me and so I was already on alert for that I guess." A goal during Aylin's student teaching, however, was focused on overcoming feelings of uncertainty. During our debriefings, in which I was her UFT, Aylin and I discussed approaches to the entirety of the job with more confidence and less doubt.

Aylin told her mentor teacher she expected to feel frustrated if she had to do the same lesson as her team. “I shared that with her because it would be a frustration I would have and you know, she talked to me about how that happens in the job normally anyway.” Aylin’s mentor teacher stated she may teach differently from one of the other teachers down the hallway, but they were still teaching the same content. She stated, “We never get mad at each other. That’s just how we do it.”

Aylin experienced many aspects of collegial relationships while working with a grade level teaching team. She mentioned some of her learning about working in a team.

> I think the frustration grew there as we are were sort of seeing who we were as teachers and how we wanted to teach and implement things. Because we were like, “We're going to do this together, we're going to teach it the same way,” I think we all started to realize maybe we don't like doing things the exact same way. That might have been where more tensions arose for us. Just because we were finding ourselves as teachers and how we worked in our room. It also depended on our students.

Considering her own classroom of learners, Aylin originally presented her lesson idea to her team at an earlier meeting. She told me that her idea “kinda got pushed to the side.” When this happened, she initially thought she could let go of her plan and follow the other lesson.

Realizing she wanted to do something different, and after talking with her mentor teacher, Aylin approached her team at the next meeting and told them, “remember how I talked about doing it this way? I think I'm going to maybe do it that way. I just feel like, for my students in particular, they might get more out of it. I want to push them with a research area and pulling out important things for down the road.”

Aylin acknowledged she regularly talked with her mentor teacher about teaching. She admitted this conversation, however, had worried her. “I was even nervous talking to my mentor. I don't know why I was nervous. We're very similar. She's very understanding and easy to talk to. I just, you know, "this isn't a really positive thing, but I need some advice on it, you know." Aylin mentioned feeling anxious quite often in the months she was student teaching, and this was mentioned as we discussed this moment. She also mentioned she continued worrying about her plan even after talking about it with her mentor teacher. She had fretted her colleagues were annoyed with her plans, or even angry with her.

Aylin felt better, on the other hand, after she taught her lesson and her students completed their work. “They did an awesome job and did really quality work…they took a lot away from it and made connections to our first kick off lesson we did and many lessons to come with their own independent research.”

Curious how, and if, this change affected team meetings, as well as if her team was annoyed with her, I asked Aylin about the team dynamic moving forward. She smiled and stated, “I don't think that necessarily caused much of an issue for us. It was just, kind of, like a lesson. Then it was over and then we moved on to the next thing.” She did mention, though, the team did not always see eye-to-eye on other lessons down the road. Aylin indicated that as she and the other teacher candidates became more comfortable teaching, they developed more of a style and a way of thinking about teaching. “But it’s expected from any group of people that work together at some point. It’s a realistic thing that we’re going to see in the workplace.

Aylin’s workplace consisted of weekly grade level team meetings. Sharing more about her mentor, Aylin stated they talked together about working in a team. She noted her mentor teacher discussed sometimes doing lessons your own way because it is what is best for students.

Sometimes, her mentor noted, working with a team is difficult, because the other members may not want to hear your ideas. In that case, Aylin's mentor advised her to do it her way. Aylin clarified her mentor was not advising her to hide things or lie to her colleagues. "Usually she wouldn't say, 'don't tell anybody.' That's not how she is at all. But she knew the people and the situation. She read it well and knew, in the way she could, the best. Just how to guide me through that in particular."

Aylin shared she felt the meeting with her mentor teacher was meaningful because she grew as a professional. "Take that moment and show my independence, my independence in breaking away from the group and sharing what I had to share. Doing something the way I felt it should be, or how I felt it would be best implemented." She went on and stated, "This was a time where I finally felt I spoke up and said what I thought and shared my idea instead of sitting back and just doing what the group did." Aylin suggested she had recognized how her students learned best and was then acting on it by "bringing it into my teaching."

Bringing ideas into her teaching has become easier for Aylin. In her new position, Aylin shared she has already run into times she wanted to approach her teaching team about lessons she considered adjusting or doing differently for her class. Because she had the experience during student teaching, she has found it easier to speak to her team about her ideas.

As Aylin became more engaged in the classroom, moreover, she talked more often with her mentor teacher about teaching and teamwork. She discussed things she learned from regular discussions with her mentor teacher, beginning with how her mentor modeled thinking through ideas. "When we sat down in team meetings, she would listen. She would sit back and listen for a while; you could always see her think." Aylin mentioned her mentor teacher would listen

carefully and then talk through how ideas would benefit students. “When she came up with something, she would share her idea, but she wouldn't push it on others.”

After team meetings concluded, Aylin and her mentor teacher went back to their classroom and talked through the ideas presented. “She would talk about how she felt and sometimes she, like, she would have frustrations with others on the team. Um, she was very good at brushing them off and letting them go.” Aylin argued this was important to learn to do because, “You can’t get stuck on something… she would really just tell me her whole thinking process and what she was planning on doing next.” If Aylin’s mentor did something different than her colleagues, she clarified for Aylin, “But maybe do this a little differently. It's not going to make any discerning difference by any means. They're not getting different content or anything like that.” Aylin said her mentor teacher was quite good at sharing her thought process and would sometimes stop what she was doing to tell Aylin why.

Aylin’s mentor, in particular, unpacked this thought process when Aylin came forward to talk with her about sharing with her team. In that conversation, Aylin’s mentor gave her things she could say. “She'd be like, ‘Well you could say it like this. So then, you know, they're not...You're doing it in a nicer way. If they don't take it, you're just like...’Ok’, you know?" Aylin’s mentor helped her out with things to say by also relating times in her own career when she had made challenging or daunting decisions. These conversations included Aylin and her mentor talking through the what ifs; Aylin even called it talking through “the weirdest stuff.” “Yeah, we would play out the situation and then think, ‘Yeah, but what if they go about it like this? What if they respond like this? What do I do then?’”

It became meaningful for Aylin to embrace her ideas, show her independence by sharing these ideas with the team, and respectfully break from the group, if needed, and implementing instruction the way she felt was best.

Analyzing Aylin's Experience

Aylin's story centered on the confidence she gained, from talking with her mentor teacher, in her instructional ideas. Stepping back from Aylin's story, I examine, hermeneutically, the mentoring, and her mentor as they appear in her story.

Aylin and her mentor had a respectful relationship. Walking into their classroom during Aylin's student teaching period, guests perhaps noticed the teachers laughing with each other and their students. Aylin and her mentor boosted each other's confidence and their students, both during teaching and in conferences. Aylin's mentor teacher, as needed, made observations and critiques about Aylin's performance, but used her own experiences, evidence from lessons, and couched her commentary through observations and questions.

In her second year of mentoring a year-long Teacher Candidate, Aylin's mentor noted in the initial three-way meeting she wanted her mentoring to be a positive experience. Her efforts to mentor in this way were reflected throughout Aylin's interview. Aylin discussed how her mentor talked about teaching: "Her modeling was good. But the explaining the thinking process and *why* she was doing things was really beneficial for me." Aylin clarified further her mentor teacher would do this even in the middle of teaching if she noticed Aylin watching with a confused or inquisitive expression. "She would stop and be like 'Okay, well, I'm thinking this, and this is why.' The way she modeled was exactly how she would give me advice and do things."

Aylin's story, and commentary on her mentor's actions, highlighted the notion her mentor engaged in mentoring "on the fly" as well as mentoring through reflection. Just as she

engaged in think alouds for her students, Aylin's mentor teacher used this same concept for Aylin. In my own experience with Aylin's mentor teacher, I observed this same practice. I watched her teach a small reading group (for another, unrelated, project) and she made a point of explaining to the children why she was making particular moves. Later, the mentor told me she did that, during that observed lesson, in case the children, or I, had questions. In this way, Aylin's mentor used a metacognitive approach to her teaching practice.

Aylin's mentor was usually present at the grade level team meetings, so it is likely she was also at the meetings in which Aylin first presented her idea (when it was mostly ignored) and also when she stated she was doing the lesson a little differently. Aylin cannot remember if her mentor was present both times because sometimes the mentors would leave meetings, or come late, depending on other school business. At any given meeting in attendance, Aylin's mentor, per Aylin's own words, was sitting and listening quietly, while also thinking through the conversation. Her presence was likely there, even if she was not.

Thoughtful conversation, an important part of this mentoring moment, occurred because Aylin brought the issue forward to her mentor. Her mentor, in return, was responsive to Aylin, by both listening and discussing next steps. Aylin shared how her mentor encouraged her to listen thoughtfully, think through plans offered, present her own ideas, and then decide what to teach based on her students' needs. Because teachers usually work in grade level teams, Aylin recognized she needed to feel comfortable working with them yet stand on her own when it mattered.

> I learned how to talk to peers about things that maybe we wouldn't necessarily agree on, but how you really have to be conscious on how you go about that, when you're working

with others in this career cause you work with them every day. But then in the end having to do what's best for your students.

Aylin told me on several occasions during her student teaching that she was quiet like her mentor. Yet, she noted her mentor "knew basically every situation that went on." So, while she was quiet, Aylin's mentor was keenly aware of Aylin's experiences.

Aylin's mentor, thoughtful and reflective, talked through instances with Aylin. These instances were teaching moments and they were also collaborative. Aylin told me she "was very good at working with others." Nevertheless, her mentor encouraged Aylin to "tweak ideas" so as to benefit students, therefore valuing her vision. Aware her mentor had a quiet strength, Aylin claimed her mentor always said, "why she thought about saying something the way she did to someone else." Aylin's mentor, in doing this, demonstrated for Aylin a quiet confidence. She, furthermore, validated the same in Aylin while encouraging her to demonstrate the same in herself.

Heather's Story of Learning from Her Students

Heather, after thinking about the question for a few moments, shared that working with one student in her classroom was the moment she learned a great deal about teaching. Her first words, after she had time to think, were, "teaching is so much more than just teaching." Heather used this phrase to begin talking about a time she had misjudged a student's readiness for class and had, in addition, misread his demeanor. She stated she used gentle reminders twice to get him working, as these reminders sometimes worked in the past. When those reminders did not work, she moved to what she believed, in the moment, was the next step,

> Eventually, I kind of got to the point where I was, you know, I didn't know what I needed to do. So then I pulled out the big guns, the scary teacher voice. He responded so negatively in the moment, and it almost set him off.

Heather noted that when this happened, she separated herself from the situation so as not to escalate it further. Later in the day, she pulled aside this student to talk about what happened. She asked him to tell her why he had gotten so upset. He replied with a story about his previous evening. "He said something like, 'I didn't sleep well last night, and I wanted to spend time with my moms, and I didn't get time to spend with my moms. They had to work, they had to do this or that.'"

Heather first commented, "Well, I felt like an idiot 'cause if I would've known I would've taken a different approach." She laughed at herself for a moment. Afterward, she took a more serious tone as she discussed what she realized in that moment. She first stated she thought more about what happened and how what the teacher says or does affects students. Not only does this affect students individually, but students also differ from day to day. She next claimed,

> And so I think that moment just kind of cemented the idea to me teaching is just so much more than teaching. It's getting to know your kids; it's building those relationships and it's operating under the assumption that they do want to learn. That they want to learn and if they're not doing what you ask of them, if they're not following directions, there is something going on. Never to underestimate that and how much it might affect their will to learn and their motivation to learn.

This moment impacted Heather, but she also pointed out it was one of many in which she thought to herself, "Well, that taught me a lesson that I'm going to carry through for rest of the teaching career."

When asked to elaborate on this further, she explained,

> You have to understand that sometimes they [students] don't know what's happening. Sometimes they can't tell you what's wrong or they can't tell you what's setting them off. It's not like they're going to sit down and list all of their triggers and then you easily avoid them. You have to figure it out through experience and that was one of those moments.

Heather felt, prior to this teaching moment, she had an "okay relationship" with this student. Moving forward from this moment, she made greater efforts to speak to him one-on-one, to listen to him and, rather than making assumptions about what was happening, to ask him.

I asked Heather to tell how she felt when this moment happened because it was in the middle of a crowded classroom while teaching a mathematics lesson. She immediately responded by stating she had felt frustrated. She also realized she did not know as much about teaching as she thought she did. She noted challenges are inherent in pushing and/or inspiring students because while teachers are required to plan lessons in advance and prepare instructional materials, one student may "throw off the entire thing". When that happens, Heather argued, teachers may feel panicked but should maintain a level of calm. Because she altered her thinking about this student in response to this teaching moment, she adjusted her response to all students, in that classroom, but also in the future. "I learned from that point onward that responding with a very calm tone or responding without raising my voice, and smiling and saying, 'thank you' got me very far with him." She further elaborated, "He'd be misbehaving, off-task, and I'd be like, 'can you go ahead and stop that please.' Then he would stop, and I'd be like, 'Thank you so much," and then he's, 'Um, okay.'" (As she said this last bit, her voice changed to a tone of both confusion and questioning.)

As Heather elaborated on her thinking, she started laughing and said this student thought her weird because her response was not expected. Heather argued relationships were critical in teaching. She then offered another story explaining why relationship building, with her students, was so important. Referring to another student, with whom she normally conversed when they each arrived at school in the morning, she first shared this student, “She had some, probably some anxiety-type related things because I have a little bit of that myself.” She went on to explain that one day while her mentor teacher was teaching, she noticed this student behaving differently. Not only was the student hunched over her desk, but she was also doodling on her paper.

Because Heather had established a relationship with her already, she knew not to pull her out of class. Knowing she did not like being singled out in any way, she slipped her student a note:

> So, what I did was I wrote her a note and I said, "Are you okay? Check yes or no." I slipped it on her desk as I walked by. It was very low-key. Then I went by again and picked it up. She said no, so I wrote, “Would you like to go outside and talk about it? Would you like to tell me about it right here?” Then I slipped it back to her.

Heather, in that moment, knew it was best to let her student choose how she would talk about what bothered her. Her student did write back. She told Heather she didn’t always feel good about herself, especially when they were doing XYZ. Heather responded by affirming she respected her student’s needs and wishes, and that she was, moreover, a good learner. Heather stated her note passing strategy worked particularly well with this student but may not with others. She also pointed out that “knowing” her kids helped her realize what to do.

Referring to her class more generally, Heather asserted students occasionally feed off the restlessness of a few. As she learned this, she tried to respond with constructive support. She said, as an example, “If for some reason they were a little bit off task in the morning, we were walking laps before our recess play time and then I’d walk with them.” Heather emphasized that understanding her students was important to teaching.

When I asked a follow-up question of Heather and how she will use, in her new classroom, what she learned from her students, she mentioned lesson planning. Using her knowledge of students, Heather talked about the importance of well-planned lessons. To take a case in point, Heather mentioned starting at the beginning: “You're drawing from those big ideas and you're eventually boiling it down to a lesson…you're thinking about your class as a whole and you're boiling it down to what you need to happen in that lesson behavior wise, student wise to make it successful.”

As she thought more about taking this knowledge into her new classroom, she commented that you always “try,” and think about the students when planning for instruction. Just as important, she also said:

> It's on your mind a great majority, it's on your mind almost as much as making sure you hit XYZ objective, as much as you hit XYZ big idea. You're thinking, ‘How do I make sure that so and so and this student and this learner gets what they need and gets as much as they need but not too much.

Analyzing Heather’s Experience

Both Aylin and Ben talked a great deal about their mentors. Heather’s story, on the other hand, is anchored in the relationships she built with her students. While she talked about her mentor later in the interview, the mentoring relationship, on the surface, seemed peripheral to

Heather's story. Conversely, her descriptions, when read hermeneutically, suggest her mentor may have influenced some of her thinking.

Like Aylin and her mentor teacher, Heather and her mentor had a respectful and collegial relationship. Although her mentor was not overtly present in the previous section, Heather's mentor provided encouragement, as well as insights, throughout Heather's student teaching experience. This next section explores ways Heather's mentor was present for Heather and supported her during the student teaching year.

Heather, as she talked about her relationship with students, first mentioned her mentor teacher when she discussed the student with whom she had passed notes. When Heather approached her mentor teacher about the student's behavior and concerns, her mentor teacher admitted she had not noticed. Because she was not teaching at the time and instead helping students with the task, Heather said she, herself, likely noticed because she was zeroed in on her students. Heather also acknowledged she feels very "in tune" to how people carry themselves. With this student, in particular, that behavior was different enough she wanted to check with her student.

Heather cited her mentor teacher again when she acknowledged showing passion for her teaching. Heather spoke of her mentor teacher's enthusiasm for her students and how often former students came into the classroom just to say hello. Heather, moreover, told me what she learned from her mentor teacher, "Every student is different, every student is going to react in a different way. Every student has things going on at home whether they're big or small. To really try to key into those and make yourself approachable." While Heather did not make a connection between the moment she felt she learned about teaching and this observation about her mentor teacher, the learning she described is embedded in the interaction she had with her student.

When I asked Heather to tell me more about how her mentor modeled keying into students and making yourself approachable, she stated, “it’s just like the vibe that you put out,” and you not only show students you care for them, but you also are present for them so they will come to you if needed. Heather said both she and her mentor teacher had a similar state of mind when interacting with students.

Heather continued talking about her mentor teacher’s interactions with the class and told me, “She is amazingly talented, she just can really reign them in, she really knows how to command the classroom.” She went on to state her mentor teacher knew what to teach because she had a good grasp of content, but she especially admired her mentor’s dedication to improving her practice. “The other thing that I really, really like about her and her teaching style is that she consistently is trying to improve.”

Heather claimed her mentor teacher, moreover, was “constantly being metacognitive about her approach, her deliver, and how she could improve.” When asked to expand further on this statement, Heather speculated because her mentor teacher was originally trained as an art teacher and moved to the classroom a handful of years ago, she was probably focused on improving her teaching of all subjects. Based on meetings with Heather and her mentor teacher, this is likely correct. Heather’s mentor teacher mentioned in these meetings she was always learning, but she wanted to infuse her art background, whenever possible, in her teaching. As Heather reflected with her mentor teacher, she also learned to do the same thinking about her own teaching practice.

Heather, like both Ben and Aylin, regularly engaged in discussions about teaching practice. This included asking her mentor teacher to review lesson plans and provide constructive criticism. Heather, moreover, was encouraged by her mentor teacher to reflect on her practice.

Her mentor, in the early weeks, asked for Heather's opinion after lessons. "She constantly would be like, 'Well, I think that lesson kind of sucked and so how could I do that better?' I really loved how she would even bring me in on the dialogue." Heather claimed she was reluctant to respond in the beginning, but, as time progressed, she became more comfortable and would consider what she would do in her mentor's place. The two, then, would talk through ideas.

Talking through ideas regularly with her mentor teacher is how Heather recognized that while her mentor teacher already knew the student she mentioned in her story, and had a relationship with him, to Heather it was all new. Working with him, Heather noted, provided her opportunities to work with him in different ways. She argued, moreover, that her mentor had a good relationship with this student and was able to help him "reset" quite often.

During discussions with her mentor teacher, and through reflection, Heather recognized the level with which students impact lessons. As much as she carefully planned and wanted all her lessons to be successful, she recognized lessons sometimes fail.

> I would forget you can always do a second revision. If it [a lesson] doesn't go well you can do a reteach and then you move on. I think through the internship, with a couple experiences, I learned more and more that as much as I want it to be perfect, beautiful, and for all the students to be on task and for all of them to learn everything I want them to learn, to be fully engaged the whole time, that's not usually the case, that's not realistic.

Engagement, by students during lessons, is also affected by forces outside a teacher's control. Heather noted this happened and her mentor showed her how to recover from fire drills, interruptions at the door, visitors, and more.

She also mentioned good advice she received from her mom:

> You just have to know it's not going to be perfect. It's going to be…and my mom says this, too. She always says do the best you can do, that's all anybody can ask. You do your best and then you let it be. If you do it again, you improve. You look back on it [the lesson] in a year and think, "How can I make that better.?"

Along with sharing the advice she received from her mother and her mentor teacher, Heather said she fully expected her first year of teaching to "beat out of me" what was left of her wish to be perfect all the time.

Heather recognized striving to be continually perfect could take away learning opportunities in the classroom. She told me she started out her student teaching year by working through all the homework problems before correcting them with students. After running out of time to always do this, she realized one day, after conferring with her mentor teacher, that working the problems *with* her students provided more opportunities for them because they learned through mistakes. She told me, "Because they're [students] like, 'Excuse me, you actually should've done this.' I was like, 'Oh good catch!' That's something I have learned, and I will continue to learn but she played a huge role in that."

Heather noted her learning continued all through student teaching and she expected it to continue into her first year of teaching. She believed, furthermore, learning is continuous, an attitude she observed in her mentor teacher, who analyzed her own practice throughout the year. Heather planned to continue learning from her students and while teaching. She remarked that learning is continuous, "It's very fast paced, it's very dynamic and you can't predict it."

Lisa's Story of Learning Through Disappointment

Lisa's story, like Heather's, is anchored in the relationship she had with her students. In the same manner as Ben, furthermore, she believed she learned the most through a teaching failure.

When asked the question, Lisa answered almost immediately, "I think one day, this definitely sticks in my brain, you were there, and I was trying to teach a social studies lesson and it just was not working at all." Lisa's story did take place when I was there to observe her instruction. At the time this took place, she had been student teaching for a few months and knew both her students, and the classroom procedures, well.

Lisa's students had joined her at their regular meeting spot in the front of the room. At this spot, Lisa or her mentor teacher, along with the students, regularly conducted lessons, read stories to the children, or met to discuss the day. I had witnessed Lisa teaching other lessons in this space. On this day, Lisa's lesson was repeatedly interrupted by her students. She ultimately decided to discontinue instruction and retaught the lesson later in the day. Because I had to move on to a different school for another scheduled observation, I was not able to watch Lisa reteach her lesson. I did, however, call her that evening to check in with her about this second attempt at instruction.

Lisa's instruction started when all her students were at the meeting spot. She indicated; however, it was not a successful start. "I kept trying to ask them questions and they would just not stop talking. They were interrupting, they weren't paying any attention." Lisa tried using her mentor teacher's established methods of getting attention and found that students did not respond. In her words,

> [I was] at the carpet for two or three minutes, trying to pass out little bonus tickets for those sitting quietly or doing little clapping things, saying our little classroom things to get them to be quiet. None of that was working so after about two or three minutes I had them reset the first time. I said we need a break, we need to quiet down, this is time to learn.

Lisa stopped what she was doing and instructed students to return to their seats.

They were told, at their seats, to put down their heads for a few minutes. Lisa told me because the lesson involved group work, she knew if she did not get them better focused, they would not get anything done. After resetting, she hoped students would come back together to continue the lesson. This was a technique her mentor teacher used occasionally. Noting immediately this was, "so frustrating to me," Lisa brought her students back to their meeting area, after what she said was a couple minutes of rest and reset.

Letting a few minutes lapse, Lisa then brought her class back to the meeting spot. She told me her class was "very chatty," but in the past they had been able to complete at least most of a lesson. "It was just this time there was no saving it." When students returned, "It was just instantly. They were pretty set they were going to talk during that time." Lisa told me students started talking with their peers around them. I, myself, witnessed this happen and chose not to intervene, because I was curious how Lisa would handle the situation. During this time, Lisa's mentor teacher was also in and out of the classroom, although Lisa claimed students were not aware whether her mentor was present. Lisa continued, "Every classroom management technique that I had been practicing, everything my mentor had taught me, like, nothing was working."

Lisa acknowledged she was again frustrated over her students' indifference to instruction and she was disappointed because she wrote the social studies lesson to be educational and fun.

When I asked her if the social studies content was somehow part of the problem causing their behavior, she said no. Lisa emphasized students had seemed to enjoy other social studies lessons and were also chatty no matter the content.

Lisa warned her chatty class they needed to focus and cautioned they may lose recess if they were not ready to learn. She acknowledged a few students were listening and those students, in particular, would be allowed to have their scheduled recess. When this did not have an effect on behavior, Lisa tried one last time to quiet her class. She said, “I gave them a choice because if we're not quiet when I get to zero then it's losing afternoon recess. We had to get it done that day.” She did get to zero and her class was not responsive. “At that point,” Lisa said, “it was fairly quickly that I realized it was not going to happen.”

What did happen instead is Lisa sent her students to their seats. Knowing she did not want them sitting with their heads down for the remainder of the time, she instructed them to read quietly. All students had book boxes at their table with leveled reading material. In that moment, Lisa walked around the room helping students with books; she admonished some to read quietly and moved a few students to different, quieter, seats. Although she did not want it to show, she was frustrated and disappointed with the class and with herself. Lisa described the emotions she felt when this happened, “I tried to hold myself together until they left for lunch. It felt like a failure, I don't know, it was very upsetting. It just did not feel good, it felt like I was failing at what I was doing.”

After students had lunch and recess, Lisa’s mentor teacher met them at the exterior doors and walked them to the classroom. Lisa commented this was unusual for her to do, as she usually walked them to the classroom after recess. She said her students took off their outdoor gear quietly, walked into the room quietly, and went straight to the meeting spot.

> They sat there, and they listened, and it was completely different than what happened in the morning. I mean it was kind of a weird feeling, because they were really quiet and you could tell that some of them were disappointed with themselves. You know the ones, usually the good listeners, who were not that morning, and you could kind of see on their faces, "Like man I probably should've listened the first time...".

Lisa's mentor teacher, once students were seated, expressed her displeasure at the morning's failed lesson, told them they disrespected Lisa, and disappointed both Lisa and her. She stated the morning's behavior would not be tolerated.

I asked Lisa how she felt when her mentor teacher, and not her, started the afternoon with the class. Lisa said she was in the room but sitting with students near the back of the group.

> I don't know what I would've said to them right away. I think I still needed a minute to figure out how we were going to go on, so I think it was good that she kind of took the first step and told them what was going on… I don't know if the message would have been quite as strong [from me] as when it came from my mentor teacher. I don't even think some of them knew she was in the room at the time of the lesson. But I think that it was more meaningful coming from my mentor since she was kind of the outsider. She had seen how things were going down, but she wasn't really a part of it. Having her come in and say that she was disappointed in how they were acting, I think was definitely more beneficial.

Lisa told me follow-through was essential to her teaching style. So, when she took over for her mentor teacher and sat down with the class, she first recognized the two students who had followed her directions in the morning. These students went out for afternoon recess with another class, while the rest of the students stayed inside and worked on the lesson. She told her

class the two students did not deserve to be punished twice and she would work with them on the task separately.

Lisa, indeed, also told her students of her frustration.

> In the afternoon, it [the lesson] did work because we talked about how frustrated I was. I think they sort of realized it was important they come to school to learn. So I think seeing that you can be rewarded for doing things right, even when nobody else does, I think that was something they needed to see.

Lisa discussed successfully reteaching the lesson in the afternoon. She first told me she was "really clear" with her directions. Students were in small groups, and she emphasized "you are *working* with these people. This isn't socializing." She directed each step of preparation for the small groups and then carefully spaced out the groups in the classroom. Lisa noted they all got it done, the class had earned back some trust, and "I think that they learned something that day."

Analyzing Lisa's Experience

In the first two stories, the teacher candidates discussed learning from their mentors. Lisa's account, like Heather's, focused on learning from her students. Like Ben, moreover, a failed lesson grounded her story. At the same time, examining Lisa's story hermeneutically suggests her mentor teacher influenced her beliefs about the class which may, in turn, have contributed to the ways in which Lisa responded to her students when they were disruptive. Lisa's responses and subsequent reflection thus strengthened her beliefs.

Lisa believed her students learned something that day, but the day, of course, did not follow her lesson plan. Lisa had carefully planned a social studies lesson that included whole group and small group instruction, along with time for students to work on a partner project. She

also planned her questioning strategies since the lesson was written as a graduate class assignment, and a formal observation.

I observed this lesson as Lisa's UFT, and after the lesson we examined what happened, what she felt, and what she wanted to do differently in the future. We even talked about whether I should have intervened. (Lisa's answer was "no.") When we talked through this, Lisa's mentor teacher was present for only the first half of our conversation. When Lisa tried teaching the lesson again in the afternoon, she claimed it was successful. "I think that definitely it's okay to have a lesson go completely wrong and then revisit it later."

As she suggested earlier, Lisa's lesson went wrong almost immediately and frustrated her quickly. She said:

> I felt like I was not being seen as their teacher which was weird because it was so far into the year already. This was after Christmas break for sure. So, I just felt like they were treating me way differently than they would treat the other teacher in the classroom. So it was really frustrating and it was disappointing.

Lisa frequently used the word, "frustrated" to describe how she felt in the moment. She also admitted she was overwhelmed and did not want to "resort to" raising her voice or yelling at them. Admitting she wanted to "get them away from me," she also said it was the only way, in the moment, she felt able to control them. Lisa repeated this same phrase, "away from me" two more times in the same two-minute answer. It was something she observed her mentor teacher do. Her mentor teacher, if students were loud or unruly, would send students away from her to their desks, where they would put down their heads for a few minutes.

Lisa not only used this time to have quiet so students could reset, but she also used it to refocus herself. She said, "I think that making that decision to reset myself and not get upset with

them—probably was the better option." She also stated, again, she did not want to raise her voice. She argued, furthermore, students would "feed off" her anger. In this moment, Lisa was doing something she witnessed her mentor teacher do many times, but she likely did it without any well-defined idea of why she might act this way or in what way it might resolve the pedagogical dilemma she was facing.

When I asked Lisa to tell me more about what she was thinking at that moment, she said, "Kind of just like picturing what's going on, who was causing the most problems right now? Is there some way I can fix this, like move somebody away?" Identifying most of the class as part of "the problem," Lisa also said she thought having the whole class return to their seats meant she, "was hoping for a whole-class reset." She finished that thought by admitting:

> you know, with me, it's just taking some deep breaths, telling myself it's not you, it's something that they're all doing today. So, trying to be positive with myself and say this lesson is going to work whether we do it now or later. Just kind of keeping myself focused on what I'm supposed to be doing.

Lisa quickly realized students were not going to stop. "After it didn't stop, it's not worth it for me to sit up there and talk to just the two that were listening."

Although Lisa had two students "listening," she argued 25 were not. She recognized, because they are seven and eight years old, children will sometimes talk. "That's just what they do." Lisa admitted, moreover, her students were more likely to listen to her mentor teacher than her. She noticed less redirection whenever her mentor teacher was leading a lesson. She stated was she young, and while her mentor teacher was at the school last year, she was not. Her students "clearly" knew this. "Participation was always the same. They would participate for me;

they would participate for her. It was not like they wouldn't do things when I asked them. I think they felt they could get away with more with me."

In this way, Lisa made somewhat contradictory claims--students were both better for her mentor teacher and yet "participation was always the same" for the two of them. Taking into consideration Lisa's claim that students behaved better for her mentor teacher, I asked Lisa about the conversation she had with her mentor teacher after this challenging lesson. Looking back to that day, Lisa's mentor and I sat with Lisa for a few minutes right after the students left for lunch. In those few minutes, we both consoled Lisa, who was letting out some of the emotions she had been holding in when the lesson failed.

Her mentor, as we started our debrief, then left to get lunch, but she talked again with Lisa later that day. Lisa summarized their conversation:: I was a complete mess. I thought everything had gone horribly wrong and there was no way to fix it. She was just so positive, like it happens to everyone. We all have lessons that fail, and that was helpful, good to hear." I asked Lisa if her mentor talked through specific examples, or situations when lessons failed, with her. She said there were no examples, but added, "Just that every first-year teacher, things don't go perfectly, and you have to keep going and find a new way to do it. Find different ways to engage with the students. So definitely she was very supportive and helpful."

Although Lisa said her mentor was supportive and helpful, she did not recall her mentor telling her specific strategies to try if another lesson went this way. She reminded me we had talked about the lesson in our post observation debriefing. When I consulted my notes on that debriefing, I specifically mentioned that Lisa and I examined the decisions she made preparing and then executing the lesson.

Reflecting on knowledge from her mentor, Lisa suggested she learned other things throughout the school year versus just that day. She believed, for example, she absorbed "a lot" sitting and watching her mentor's instruction. Lisa told me she learned participation strategies such as hand signals. These, however, did not work when she used them during that day's lesson. She said, furthermore, she learned to use different voices while doing read-alouds, and she learned techniques, like using whiteboards, for teaching mathematics. Lisa stated she also learned, from watching her mentor teacher, to make eye contact with her students, "so they know you can see them, you're listening to them, so they feel included." Lisa argued the hand signals she learned did not work that day, but the other strategies she mentioned did not apply to that day's lesson.

Teaching strategies, Lisa argued, often included an external management system. She pointed out this was something she learned from her mentor teacher. She did use an external reward with the two students who were paying attention during the failed lesson. While those two students were allowed to go outside for recess, the others stayed inside. Lisa felt this was an appropriate reward. She emphasized it was important to teach students early to do the right thing and then reward them randomly. When I asked Lisa if her mentor teacher had worked with her in understanding how to work with talkative classes, she said:

> We did talk about this a lot, and how many different ways there are to get them to understand that in school, we know you want to socialize with your friends. You see them [your friends] at school and you want to talk to them, but there's a time to talk and there's a time to learn.

Lisa touched upon a strategy where she wrote table numbers on the whiteboard and gave tables tally marks for engagement. She said this was a way for positive peer role modeling.

Lisa's mentor teacher encouraged Lisa to build relationships with her students. In the beginning of the year, moreover, she shared the students' circumstances with Lisa and suggested she consider how it shaped their behavior. Lisa argued, "she definitely would help me understand some of the things our students bring with them and how we can help them adjust, help them be successful in the classroom." Despite the limited ways Lisa's mentor worked *with* Lisa on her teaching practice, she impressed upon Lisa to be cognizant of students' backgrounds. Having taught exclusively in large urban districts, Lisa argued, her mentor offered a perspective Lisa, herself, did not have.

While many of the mentor's conversations with me throughout the year were occasionally negative about students, Lisa did not mention that and focused more on what she noticed about her students and how it impacted her thinking.

> You don't want to just teach like you have 27 kids sitting there. You need to learn about *them* and understand where they're coming from to get a better idea of how to teach those 27 kids. When they come in, they're hungry, tired. They don't have clean clothes to wear, there's so much going on, and then they come in and they have to learn subtraction. It's just not their priority. So, somedays if a kid falls asleep let them sleep because obviously that's what they need right now.

Considering this understanding that students sometimes come to school with learning in the back of their mind, Lisa reflected she should not take their talkativeness personally.

While her mentor agreed they are talkative, she also impressed upon Lisa that learning was not always important for her students. Perhaps Lisa acknowledged this, but I am not sure she understood her students might also prioritize learning. Lisa's mentor did not discuss with Lisa how to adjust lesson planning or instruction to work with a chatty class. Rather than working

with Lisa to learn about teaching talkative students, she showed Lisa ways to reward and penalize students for talking. She also showed Lisa's strategies to use at any time, although it did not appear that Lisa learned how to pivot her instruction when students were distracted from learning. And when Lisa was at her lowest emotionally, and needed her mentor's support the most, she was, literally, "out to lunch." This left Lisa without a stance from which to launch an inquiry into her own teaching. When asked what she had learned, she could only fall back on cliches and generalizations.

Chapter Summary

In the stories presented, four teacher candidates discussed a time they felt they learned the most about teaching. In each of the four stories, their mentor teachers influenced how the teacher candidates thought about their own teaching and learning. While Lisa's mentor talked to her about her students and demonstrated many teaching strategies, when Lisa stopped teaching because she struggled with classroom management, her mentor may have missed an opportunity to help Lisa understand how to recover and teach an active class. Unlike Lisa's mentor, Ben's mentor helped Ben understand carefully planning and learning from his teaching. In doing so, Ben became knowledgeable about the importance of the lesson planning process while also learning more about teaching.

Learning more about teaching influenced both Heather and Aylin. Heather, while anchoring her learning through relationships with her students, realized her mentor not only valued connections with her students but also valued her own learning while teaching. Aylin, likewise, valued knowledge, especially about collegial relationships, but reflected with her mentor teacher to strengthen her own learning and ultimately affirm her beliefs about student learning.

Chapter V

Discussion

I emailed my advisor a note, letting her know I needed to talk with her immediately. So rattled, though, I looked up her cell phone number and placed a call. When she answered, I blurted, "Crystal, something happened in the field, and I do not know how to handle it." Before I could continue, she interrupted me. "Amy, I am at the dentist's office, but I am almost finished. I will call you when I leave." I hung up the phone and sat for a few minutes in my chair, unable to complete other work, or even move to refill my coffee.

Within the hour, my phone buzzed and as soon I verified it was Crystal, I answered. Crystal's voice was crisp, yet calm. "Tell me what is happening." My voice shaky, I summarized the situation within which I found myself. I was approximately one month into my graduate student appointment as a University Field Instructor (UFT). Although I had a university contact who was my immediate supervisor, she had not responded to my emails requesting a time to talk. One of my teacher candidates, slightly timid and shy, had texted me two days prior, as well as emailed, requesting a change in classroom placement. She claimed, rightly so I believed, that her mentor teacher would not mentor her.

I told Crystal all of this and summarized my thoughts on the situation. "Crystal, her mentor teacher treats her as a classroom assistant, does not talk with her about teaching practice, and her demeanor is brusque and occasionally rude. She is just as rude to me. What do I do? I am new to the position, my teacher candidate wants to be moved now, and my supervisor has not gotten back to me."

"First, Amy, you have to know teacher candidates struggle and sometimes they want out of the situation when they do not know what to do. Okay?" Crystal's voice was firm. "It is fine

for this teacher candidate to continue working in that classroom for a few more days until you hear from your supervisor."

I interrupted Crystal, "But she claims it is not fair to pay tuition when…" Now Crystal interrupted me, "You do not have the ability to move her, right? Since you do not, she will have to make do. You need to know this type of situation happens more than you realize. She is not the only unhappy teacher candidate. Handling this situation is freaking you out a bit because you are in a brand-new role, and you do not have experience yet in dealing with an unhappy teacher candidate. It will be okay."

Learning Something About Teacher Education

I began the final chapter of this dissertation project with a story from my own experience as a novice University Field Instructor because that moment is when I experienced the first flicker of interest in this research project. In this section, I first reflect on my journey towards this topic before once again returning to important literature that motivated this study.

Coming to My Question

The vignette that opened this chapter is a story from my early days as an UFT. It was a difficult time in my experience, because although I had been a successful classroom teacher, in the position of UFT I was raw and, in short, did not know what to do. The person assigned as my immediate supervisor was, I discovered later, out of town; it did not occur to me to contact an alternate supervisor or even my new colleagues. Instead, I turned to my advisor, a person I knew instinctively would offer some guidance. At that moment, I also wondered for the first time (It was not the last) if I had made a mistake in leaving my teaching position and taking up a new role as a graduate student and UFT.

Even in this new role as UFT, I realized that just as teacher candidates needed good mentors, so did I. Without a responsive mentor and supervisor, I was frustrated and stressed. Even though I met bi-weekly with other novice UFTs, the situation I described in my vignette was not something these meetings studied. Crystal helped me work through some of my stress and frustration, but since she was not involved in working with UFTs or their supervisors, she could not step in with a solution. Eventually, of course, my supervisor returned home and replied to my emails. After we talked on the telephone at length, she decided we should meet with the teacher candidate and then the mentor teacher. Although I joined these meetings, I was largely a bystander.

In these meetings, I listened as my supervisor heard from the teacher candidate. She verified a few facts with me, and then we met with the mentor teacher. During that meeting, my supervisor shared she "was pulling" the teacher candidate and placing her in a new classroom. The mentor was irate and took to veiled insults aimed at the teacher candidate and the university program. My supervisor, as we walked out of the school, told me I handled things "just fine," and that she would take care of things from there. We did not talk much about the situation again, although she later shared the story with other UFT colleagues. Knowing I did not handle things "just fine," I would have appreciated talking with her later to learn something about my mentoring and my leadership, and how I might improve my work.

Mentoring provides opportunities for novices to talk about improving their practice, to develop their professional skills, and gain confidence in their work (Bullough, 2012; Hudson, Hudson, Gray, & Bloxham, 2013; Johnson, 2007; Mena, Hennissen, Loughran, 2017). The story I shared at the beginning of the chapter was my first glimpse of a breakdown in mentoring; it was also when I initially became interested in researching the notion of mentoring, especially

mentoring teacher candidates. In meetings with them later in the school year, one teacher candidate posited, “How do student teachers learn to teach if the mentor they are placed with does not demonstrate good teaching?” While this intern felt she had a good mentor, she often worried about teacher candidates at other sites and other universities who might not have been as fortunate. I wondered, as I reflected on her question and thought back to my experience in the early days of my work as a UFT, how often teacher candidates perceived a lack of mentoring during their student teaching internship.

I frequently returned to this question as I supported more teacher candidates, collaborated with other UFTs, and studied mentoring from different perspectives. Thus, this original concern, first posed to me while a novice researcher, launched this dissertation project. Interested in teacher candidates’ voices, the final iteration probed teacher candidates about their learning in the classroom, noticing what mattered to them, and where, if at all, they included their mentors.

The Student Teaching Triad

Yee’s student teaching triad remains the dominant framework for understanding how to support teacher candidates during their student teaching internship. Each of the teacher candidates and their mentor teachers discussed in this dissertation project were members of a teaching triad that also included me. My work as a UFT, over a five-year period, immersed me in many teaching triads, some successful and others not. While immersed in these triads, I also read studies that explored how mentors influenced their teacher candidates’ efficacy and practice. Many UFTs at my university are graduate students and likely participate in a required field instructor practicum as required by their assistantship. Like the larger body of teacher preparation programs, UFTs are often a mix of graduate student assistants, university faculty, retired or practicing teachers, and school administrators.

As a graduate assistant UFT working alongside mentor teachers, but also studying mentoring for my dissertation, I hoped to better understand the experiences of teacher candidates. With so much emphasis on UFTs and mentor teachers in the research literature, I was interested in what student teachers, themselves, thought about their experience as members of a student teaching triad.

Recent studies have explored the relationship between preservice teachers' professional knowledge and improvements in mentoring (Kang, 2021; Mena, Hennissen, & Loughran, 2017; Shwartz & Dori, 2016) and field supervision (White, 2008). Teacher candidates' own understanding of their growth in professional knowledge, or how mentoring possibly influenced that growth, is largely absent in the literature. Teacher candidates, as stated previously, firmly believe the student teaching placement to be the most impactful of their teacher preparation program (Ambrosetti et al., 2017; McKim & Velez, 2017; Popescu-Mitroi & Mazilescu Crisanta, 2014).

Stories abound from practicing teachers who tell tales from their student teaching days of learning "what not to do," of failed triads, or of being left in the classroom to "figure teaching out"--to "sink or swim." Teacher candidates, nevertheless, recognize the value of having a mentor teacher. Most people are not "born to teach" and these skills do not come naturally to them. Just as teachers should teach students to become metacognitive about their own learning, or teach them how to monitor their own learning, most teacher candidates will require mentoring to become skilled at building their professional expertise. Thus, mentors–both in the classroom and from the university–should provide opportunities for their teacher candidates to further their professional knowledge. This project is centered in learning about this relationality. It is about

exploring the lived experience of learning to teach in close proximity to mentors–that is, viewing mentors through the teacher candidates' eyes.

In the next section, I first provide an overview of the four teacher candidates interviewed for this study. Finally, as I conclude, I will discuss these stories and offer suggestions for mentoring I believe they each uncovered.

Four Interns and Their Mentor Teachers

Ben included his mentor in his story immediately, believing–in retrospect–that his mentor was largely responsible for all he learned about teaching. Ben started off the year confidently, thinking that he "had it under control." His mentor stayed patiently attentive and present during this time. Then, when Ben struggled teaching a lesson for which he was ill-prepared, the mentor was ready to step in. This was a situation that Ben admitted was of his own making. Through it, he came to see that he needed his mentor teacher.

Ben's mentor was ready and scaffolded support as Ben sought to improve. Ben's story must be understood within a year-long context--one where Ben was not fully open to mentoring until he realized he had more to learn, after experiencing failure.

Unlike Ben, Aylin, from the very start of the school year, recognized that she needed her mentor. Aylin and her mentor teacher, interestingly, shared many personal traits. Both were quiet and reticent in meetings. When they shared ideas or asked questions, it was clear they participated with intentionality. Knowing her mentor was willing to listen, and reserve judgment, Aylin shared concerns and asked for feedback.

Heather, like Aylin, appreciated feedback, but she more often shared her teaching ideas and opinions. Heather and her mentor enthusiastically talked through ideas about instruction. Heather observed, without necessarily reflecting with her mentor, and sometimes made decisions

she felt were necessary. Strong in her convictions, Heather saw her mentor as much a colleague as an advisor. While Heather's confidence is to be admired, and her growth throughout her student teaching was strong, I nevertheless wonder if there is not a missed opportunity here. Was Heather too comfortable throughout the year? Did she need to experience a "sheltered failure," like Ben? Would she have grown more had she needed her mentor more? Heather's story suggests that while collegial relationships are valuable for emotional and intellectual support, they should not replace mentoring.

Lisa's mentor, likewise, regularly offered reassuring words about Lisa's efforts, but did not offer much feedback about Lisa's teaching practice. She also provided background information on Lisa's students and provided context about the school and the students' lives. But this sort of feedback let Lisa "off the hook." She did not need to take responsibility for any barriers that students might experience in their growth and learning. Lisa's mentor talked with her students about accountability and responsibility and used that vocabulary to frame her feedback with Lisa. Lisa, in other words, saw her students as responsible for the failed lesson, and not so much herself. Lisa's story suggests that while some mentors can be active and present, they are needed in a way that does not promote growth.

Let us return, then, to the stories of Ben, Aylin, Heather, and Lisa one last time.

Student Teaching Requires Teacher Candidates to be Grounded in Learning About Teaching

Ben's story, I believe, supports the notion of grounding professional education in the practice of teaching (as opposed, for example, to research articles about teaching). Up until the moment Ben failed, he was not fully present in his student teaching. He believed he did not need all the weeks he would be student teaching, and admitted he had "trick up his sleeve to wing it."

Ben acknowledged he was overconfident when he admitted he initially thought, “I can do this teaching thing. I don't see why we gotta do this a whole year.” When he failed teaching his math lesson, he realized he needed more practice with planning and teaching. Ben realized, in that moment, he needed his mentor.

Ben stated his mentor was “always” available whenever he had concerns, even before that day. It was after he failed, however, that Ben realized he needed mentoring. When this realization occurred, meaning making became connected to being mentored. Ben’s mentor, in return, fully responded to the renewed interest Ben had in improving both his professional knowledge and professional practice. Ben stated he talked daily about lessons and problems of practice with his mentor teacher. While he knew I reviewed his lessons, was frequently in the building, and was always available to chat, Ben’s notion of being grounded in the practice of teaching required the ongoing guidance of his mentor teacher. Ben shared, listened, and reflected on teaching with his mentor teacher all year, but he admitted he did not fully understand how preparation factored into teaching until he listened to his mentor.

Student Teachers Need Mentors Able to Support Their Professional Learning, While Also Encouraging Their Personal Growth

Aylin’s relationship to her colleagues was connected to trusting, or believing, her teaching instincts. Her interview suggested she was invested in planning for her students’ learning. “I had a bunch of ideas; I just didn't know the right way to go about them.” Aylin, for instance, recognized her mentor teacher as knowledgeable because her mentor was an experienced teacher. She also recognized her mentor made teaching decisions based on her knowledge of students and while quiet in meetings, discussed with Aylin those times her lessons would be different than her grade level colleagues.

Like many members of a teaching team, Aylin had lessons, or ideas, she wanted to teach differently. While experienced teachers, and even some teacher candidates, might have simply done this without consulting others, Aylin needed assurance in her professional knowledge. "I wanted to talk [my idea] over with her and see what she felt or what she thought would be best for our students 'cause she knew them just as well as I did." The assurance Aylin needed from her mentor, just as much as it was professional, was personal. She needed her mentor to tell her she was doing well and could, more importantly, do the work. In return, Aylin's mentor listened, offered some feedback, and more importantly, nudged her "out of the nest."

Aylin appreciated her teaching team. Once nudged, and even before, she recognized the value in collaborating with colleagues. Aylin's story models the dynamics of working in a grade level teaching team as well as the way a community of practice may operate. Through mentoring, Aylin learned to trust her ideas and make professional decisions. While Aylin continued needing her mentor for reflections on teaching practice, her mentor was able to push her to become more confident in herself. Her mentor taught Aylin to need her just a little bit less.

Collegial Relationships with Mentors Are Constructive During Student Teaching, But They Should Not Replace Reflecting on Student Learning

Heather claimed the close relationship she built with her students was at the heart of the moment she learned the most about teaching. While Heather had quickly established a relationship with her mentor, that relationship was primarily collegial. She did not really need her mentor. Heather's mentor accepted Heather as a student teacher, but also as a teammate. Heather, on the other hand, appreciated feedback, but did not feel strongly attached to implementing it. Instead, she viewed it more as "food for thought." She observed her mentor in the early weeks of student teaching, but then quickly moved into the role of co-teacher. Heather

did not always debrief with her mentor. She felt comfortable making any teaching decisions she felt were necessary.

Strong in her convictions, Heather saw her mentor as much as a colleague as an advisor. While she mentioned reflecting with her mentor teacher, these discussions did not directly influence the moment she learned the most about teaching. Through her story, it does not appear that Heather's mentor could find a way to make herself needed. Heather's self-described "self-actualization" afforded her a sense of confidence that carried over into her student teaching. What is missing from Heather's story, then, are deeper reflections about student learning and the very uncertain and precarious nature of teaching itself. Naturally, relationships with students are critical to one's teaching practice and self-confidence is a trait to be desired in a teacher. But when they predominate so completely, what are the impacts on professional learning?

Some Mentors Do Not Encourage Student Teachers' Professional Growth

Feedback may be both reflective and constructive. Lisa's mentor, recognizing Lisa was upset that she could not move forward with her lesson, commented on the students' behavior and their lack of focus in the lesson, rather than on Lisa's instruction. During the lesson, Lisa's mentor was in and out of the classroom, working with individual students. She did not step into the lesson at any time, to assist or co-teach, although when Lisa sent students to their desks a second time, I observed this mentor teacher speak quietly to a handful of students.

Lisa's story was about a failed lesson. But, unlike the case with Ben, the focus of their conversation did not turn to the planning or execution of the lesson. When Lisa talked with her mentor later in the day about the lesson, her mentor first suggested that the class has always struggled to focus. She commented on their boisterousness and argued their talkative nature affected the lesson. She also told Lisa that failure happens to all teachers. While this is certainly

true, Lisa's mentor made no attempts to reflect with Lisa about how things could have gone differently. I believe Lisa would have benefited from a conversation that focused on her lesson planning and her teaching moves. Focusing outward on the students took responsibility away from Lisa and put it squarely on the students, a move that I believe impacted how much Lisa learned in this moment.

The question arises, then, what did Lisa learn? Despite claims that her mentor was helpful, I fear that Lisa did not learn anything at all. When I pressed Lisa to share how her mentor presented learning through failure, she told me her mentor did not give any examples, but instead told her, "Every first-year teacher, every new teacher, things don't go perfectly. You have to keep going and find a new way to do it. Find different ways to engage with the students, so definitely she was very supportive and helpful."

What Might Teacher Educators Learn from These Stories?

Learning, common sense says, may occur in any situation. If you, for example, forget your ballet slippers when you attend your first class, you learn to bring them in the future. But what if you do not know you need ballet slippers? Should you have learned from your teacher the shoes and equipment needed for that first class? I use this ballet metaphor because ballet dancing is a specialized form of dance. Ballet instructors prepare their students with a list of needed gear and equipment prior to their first class.

Teacher candidates, like those inexperienced ballet students, do not always know what they need to be successful student teachers. Their mentors are largely responsible for their growth during student teaching. Learning as becoming, as defined by Hodkinson et al., (2008) nicely frames all the skills and practices teacher candidates learn while student teaching: both the expected (how to successfully teach a math concept) and unexpected (how to deescalate an angry

student). This theory is also situational, for if situations do not occur, or are not addressed, learning as becoming may be limited.

The failed lessons experienced by Ben and Lisa were situational. By that, I mean that the failures could not have been predicted ahead of time—and, in that way, presented opportunities for learning. Ben realized he needed his mentor, so he asked for help and his mentor responded. Lisa's mentor teacher, on the other hand, did not urge Lisa to examine her teaching practice in any way and gave her a pep talk about difficult days. Even when I pressed Lisa about her preparation and teaching moves, she defaulted to talking about her students' chattiness. Teacher candidates will likely experience both "good trouble" and "bumpy moments" --examining these situations, especially during student teaching, helps teacher candidates become through learning (Bien & Selland, 2018; Romano, 2005).

Framing problems of practice within practical situations is a central way that teacher candidates may become through learning. The influence of educative mentoring is seen in this type of framing, in which teacher candidates and novice teachers learn to teach while also developing the dispositions to learn from their practice and to learn through becoming (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Hodkinson et al., 2008). Adaptive mentoring (van Ginkel et al., 2015) is an opportunity for mentor teachers to adapt to individual differences in both teacher candidates and novice teachers. Adaptive mentoring, I think, extends educative mentoring to include not only the mentoring practices suggested by Feiman-Nemser (1998), but also to recognize the emotional state, and concerns, of the teacher candidates. I believe Ben's and Aylin's mentors used adaptive mentoring (and Heather's could have) as they encouraged both personal and professional growth.

The "why" of teaching is likely a good place to root mentoring for teacher candidates such as Heather, who are otherwise confident in their grasp of the "how" of teaching. Heather felt she understood many of the practical parts of teaching, such as classroom management and she felt confident in her ability to relate to her students. Adapting mentoring to the "why" of teaching, for candidates such as Heather, develops complex tacit knowledge in teacher candidates ready for more educative, and reflective, mentoring (Bradbury, 2010; Kang, 2021; van Ginkel et al., 2015; Zanting et al., 2001).

Final Thoughts

Professor David Stroupe, in his doctoral seminar on learning to teach, imparted in me the knowledge that any time I thought I knew everything about teaching, I instead had many, or more, questions to uncover. Despite this acknowledgement of the challenges inherent in this field, I believe it is both necessary and timely. Yee's framework of the student teaching triad remains the dominant model for university-based teacher education. The harsh reality masked by the stability of this framework is, however, that not much has changed in student teaching.

The current national shortage of K-12 teachers appears to only be getting worse and with that knowledge, supporting student teachers is more important than it has been in a very long time. Therefore, asking recent teaching graduates to talk about their experiences as student teachers has provided opportunities for continued reflection on practices that supported their learning. These reflections are not meant, in themselves, to transform teacher education, but instead to validate experiences and moments where learning occurred–while also challenging those working in teacher education to listen to the voices of teacher candidates.

For my part, I will continue investigating student teaching by listening to recent teacher candidates and center their voices to bring attention to a mostly under-researched component of preservice teacher education.

APPENDIX

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Dear recent MSU student teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to inform participants about the study, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower them to make an informed decision. As in all research, your participation is completely voluntary. Feel free to ask me any questions you may have, at any time. Research, for me, involves a lot of conversation! I want to understand your experiences. Therefore, most of the data collected will be through interviews.

P**urpose of the Research**. In this project, I am interested in examining your recent experience as a student teaching intern. Through in-depth interviews, I seek to better understand what you identify as a powerful learning moment.

What You Will Do. I would appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you at a time of mutual convenience. It is likely we will talk somewhere between one and two hours. With your permission, I will audio record the conversation and make a transcription of that recording for further review. I will, moreover, request a second interview, again to be scheduled at a time of mutual convenience. This second interview will also last one to two hours.

I would be interested in receiving any documents that you believe helped you learn something about teaching. If you do not have any documents, that is fine, too! Please note that there is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

Potential Benefits and Risks. All human interactions contain the potential for risk and benefit. Researchers are required to share with participants about the potential for risk and benefits of study participation.

It is my hope we will engage in conversations about your student teaching internship that you will find meaningful. I was once a new teacher and, in your shoes, so I think we have a lot to learn from each other. It is my hope my research will also contribute to better experiences for future student teaching interns.

Minimal risk is foreseen. Within a research context, there may be times where I inadvertently ask you a question you find too personal, or uncomfortable. You never need answer a question or talk about a topic of which you do not want to discuss.

Privacy and Confidentiality. All data for this project will be kept confidential. In written texts or transcripts, I will use pseudonyms for all persons so your actual name will never be used. Any information you share with me will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. All data for this project will be stored in a digital format—either written files on a laptop, or digital audio files—that I will immediately transfer to a laptop and delete from the audio voice recorder. My laptop is password protected and will not be left unattended in public places.

The only persons who will have access to your interview comments are you, members of the Institutional Review Board (an agency that monitors the protection of research participants), my dissertation advisor (Dr. Kyle Greenwalt), and me.

The data gathered during interviews will be used for my dissertation and other papers I may write. These papers may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants—including you—will remain hidden. If you are interested, I will share with you all papers before I make them public. I will allow you to comment. Finally, I will strive to not write anything about you of which you do not approve. My goal is to understand your experience, not judge them!

Your Rights to Participate, Say "No," or Withdraw. Participation in this research project is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all; you may refuse to participate in subsequent interviews or refuse to answer certain questions. You may discontinue your participation at any time. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from this study will not make any difference in your relationship with me, my advisors, or with Michigan State University's teacher education program.

If you have questions about this study, please contact me at any time by phone, 616-813-6462; email, croelamy@msu.edu, or regular mail, 313 Erickson Hall, College of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. You may also contact my advisor: Dr. Kyle Greenwalt (517-353-0824; greenwlt@msu.edu).

The Social Sciences/Behavioral/Educational Instructional Review Board (SIRB) oversees research at Michigan State University that involves human participants. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP) at Michigan State University: 517-355-2180; fax, 517-432-4503; email, irb@msu.edu, or regular mail, 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Thank you for considering my research study.

Sincerely,

Amy Croel-Perrien
Michigan State University

Documentation of Informed Consent. Continuing with this interview means you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

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