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Critical Peer Mentor Groups: Amplifying Support During Student Teaching

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CRITICAL PEER MENTOR GROUPS: AMPLIFYING SUPPORT DURING STUDENT TEACHING

by

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This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of student teachers who use Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups as an additional layer of support during their student teaching experience. In traditional models for teacher induction, student teachers apprentice in the classroom of an experienced, cooperating teacher. In this mentor/mentee relationship, there is an inherent power hierarchy. By utilizing CPM groups in addition to this traditional model, the student teachers had a peer relationship through which to also learn. The findings indicate that by utilizing a CPM group, the student teachers received and provided holistic support for each other during this transitional time. In addition to supporting each other, the student teachers amplified their access to veteran cooperating teachers, by learning and sharing personal teaching strategies, content instruction, and behavior management concerns from each other's cooperating teachers. Finally, the student teachers exercised the tools necessary to embed collaboration into their teaching lives. Implications from the findings of this study include the following: utilizing CPM groups can be a powerful tool in developing early career teachers; there is potential for embedding CPM groups earlier in teacher education programs; and the utilizing CPM groups during the first few professional years could serve as a retention mechanism among new teachers

Key Words: *critical peer mentoring, student teacher, teacher identity development, positioning theory, phenomenology*

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my daughters, Kelsey and Audrey, who watched and encouraged me for years as I fulfilled a dream. My hope is that this is a reminder that dreams are not mutually exclusive – it is possible to dedicate yourself to both family and passion. May you always follow your heart, knowing that I will support you as you fulfill your own dreams. And, to my husband, Dan, who knows what it means to write a dissertation and still encouraged and supported me to do it anyway. Thank you, and I love you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Multimedia Objects

Figures

Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

From the outside, teaching seems to be a very straightforward profession. Teach the lessons to the students, make sure they learn and understand them, assess them, and then move on. This, however, is nowhere close to what actually happens in a classroom. Teaching is complex. Sonia Nieto says it best,

> *Those who can, teach*. Teaching *is* doing: It takes reflection, planning, nurturing, dreaming, scheming, imagining, effecting, judging, succeeding, failing, improving, and then figuring it out all over again. It takes imagination, perseverance, and lots of courage. Teaching is not for the faint of heart. It is not easy; it never has been" (emphasis in original) (Nieto, 2014, p. 9).

If we know this about teaching, then, as a profession, it behooves us to send our newest teachers into the field with as many skills and supports as possible. And, because teaching is such a complex profession, student teachers must understand and learn to thrive in the complexities. They need to explicitly understand that teaching is not a profession 'that anyone can do.' There are methods to be learned, and strategies to be taught so that when they reach their first classrooms, they are able to educate all of the students in their classrooms. We need to give them a chance to utilize the skills they have

learned in their teacher education courses. They need to have the opportunity to develop their teaching identity, and at the same time learn professionalism.

Traditional supports, and ones that can be effective in the teaching profession are cooperating teachers and university supervisors. But, as this study will illustrate, Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups can add an additional layer of support for student teachers, which also gives them the opportunity to use their agency in their teacher identity development.

The participants in this study offer insights into the potential for student teachers to learn from, and grow with, each other. They illustrate the possibility to use traditional supports, as well as create ones that they specifically need and want. One participant, Lillian, whose voice you will hear throughout this study described her group's collaboration during the semester by saying the following:

> I just think in any aspect of life, any profession, collaboration is really important. But I think in the education setting, it's vital. I think you have to be able to talk to one another and gain other perspectives and just grow from the wisdom of other people around you and the experience of other people. And, so I think that collaboration and leaning on one another [is important], because you understand each other on a different level, because they also are teachers.

Throughout this study, you will hear the voices of student teachers who experienced the additional layer of support from their CPM group during their student teaching

experience, and how these supports became an opportunity to learn and grow in the early stages of their career as a teacher.

Problem Statement

Student teaching is a time of transition for those who are learning to become teachers. Technically, they are still students and are not fully credentialed to be teachers in their own classrooms. Yet, during their student teaching experience, they plan and enact lessons, assess students, and continue to learn what is involved in classroom teaching. In essence, they have two jobs, teaching and learning to teach (Wildman et al., 1989).

Additionally, it is during this time of transition that student teachers are under the guidance of a cooperating teacher, an experienced teacher who opens her classroom to the learning of the student teacher (Clarke et al., 2014). Difficulties can arise during the student teaching experience when cooperating teachers and student teachers do not share the same teaching philosophy, understandings of student learning, or teaching methodologies (Clarke et al., 2014). A power hierarchy (Canipe & Gunckel, 2020; Matsko et al., 2020; Vass, 2017) can cause the learning relationship to be unproductive for the student teacher, which in turn can affect their teacher identity development (Beijaard et al., 2004). In short, traditional supports for student teachers may not be enough.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to illuminate the phenomenon of the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups during their student teaching experience. By interviewing student teachers who have participated in Critical Peer Mentor groups, as well as utilizing the coursework during their student teaching seminar, I describe the phenomenon of how student teachers support and challenge each other critically during their final semester in university prior to their professional credentialing. The participants in this study are Elementary Education majors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who student taught in Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms in school districts in Nebraska and in Texas.

Research question

All phenomenology studies explore the lived experiences of the participants in a new or unique setting. Therefore, the phenomenological research question for this study is: What are the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor groups?

Theoretical framework

This study is a phenomenological research study. By definition, any phenomenological study will use a phenomenological philosophy framework as its first analysis. This study will follow the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who created the hermeneutic branch of phenomenology. Heidegger believed that it was impossible to

bracket oneself out of the research because we "are always in the world with others in the circumstances of existence" (Peoples, 2021, p.32). This framework, as well as the next two frameworks, will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

The second order of theoretical frameworks for this study is teacher development theory, specifically the agency component, ultilizing Beijaard et al (2004) as the framework to organize more recent studies. This framework enabled exploration of how the Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups affect, if any, the teacher identity development of the student teachers. In other words, how did their identities shift or change, if any, due to their participation in Critical Peer Mentor groups during their student teaching experiences? This theoretical framework will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

The final order of theoretical frameworks for this study was positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). This theory was used to explore the differential power hierarchy that can occur between student teachers and their cooperating teachers, and the ways student teachers are and are not able to position themselves in traditional student teaching situations. This was contrasted by the power hierarchy of the CPM groups. This will also be further explained in Chapter 2.

Definition of terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study and are defined as follows.

Cooperating teacher (CT)

This is the most common term used to describe an experienced teacher who is working with a student teacher in a practicum experience. This teacher generally allows the student teacher to practice his or her teaching skills under their guidance in their classroom (Clarke et al., 2014). For this study, this term only refers to student teachers and not other pre-service teachers.

Student teacher

This term is used to describe a pre-service teacher who is in the final stage of their teacher education program, prior to receiving their professional license. A student teacher is apprenticing in a cooperating teacher's classroom, practicing lesson planning, lesson enactment and management, and classroom and behavior management.

Critical Peer Mentor Group

Utilizing the Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) framework (Weiston-Serdan, 2017), this term refers to the peer mentor relationship between the student teachers. Each Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) group had between 5-7 student teachers as members. The groups met bi-weekly to support and encourage each other during their student teaching experience. For this study, the members of a CPM group were all student teaching in different classrooms and/or different schools or districts. Throughout the semester, they met to discuss various topics, which are further described in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Assumptions

Because this is a hermeneutic phenomenological study, assumptions and biases will not be bracketed, or removed from the data analysis and therefore need to be recognized. The assumptions that will need to be addressed at this point of the study are acknowledged because the researcher is a former classroom teacher. As such, I was once a student teacher. While I was fortunate to have a supportive student teaching supervisor, I did not have a supportive cooperating teacher. My cooperating teacher did not embrace the latest pedagogical understanding of teaching and was hesitant to allow me to use those methodologies in her classroom. My student teaching supervisor had to intervene on my behalf in order for me to get permission to teach as I had learned in my teacher preparation and methodology courses. This experience may inform my own journaling and interpretation during data analysis. This journaling process will be detailed in Chapter 3, but briefly here, in the journaling I will try to make explicit any biases I have toward the data.

Additionally, I have also been a cooperating teacher. My time as a cooperating teacher was a revelation to my desire to work with pre-service teachers. I enjoyed this time immensely and took the mentoring position very seriously. I spent many hours working with my student teacher, helping her to find her own place in teaching and helping her to be prepared for her future classrooms. This assumption could also be used during the journaling portion of my data analysis.

By acknowledging these experiences and potential biases, I hope to illuminate the aspects of the data that may contribute to the context of this study. I also acknowledge that these potential biases could contribute to the limitations of this study, which I will address next.

Significance of the study

This study will document the lived experiences of pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience. In particular, it will investigate the ways in which student teachers utilize the resources they have learned in their teacher preparation program, and how they serve as Critical Peer Mentors for each other. Utilizing a *critical mentoring* framework, based on the work of Torie Weiston-Serdan (2017) which is explained in Chapter 2, this study will explore the use of a Critical Peer Mentor group by student teachers to support, encourage, and challenge their use of theories and strategies to better understand, support, and educate their students.

This documentation could have implications for future student teachers, and how they approach their student teaching experiences by utilizing Critical Peer Mentor groups in future student teaching seminars. This study could also have implications for the current student teachers as they could decide to create their own Critical Peer Mentor groups during their first years in their professional classrooms. And finally, this study could have implications for the teacher preparation program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and other universities and colleges by highlighting the need for Critical Peer Mentors earlier in the pre-service teachers' coursework.

Summary and organization for the remainder of the study

This chapter has detailed the introductory information necessary to answer the question, what are the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor groups? In Chapter 2, I discuss the Theoretical Framework and the Review of Literature pertinent to this study. Chapter 3 will provide the phenomenological methodology and accompanying information. In Chapter 4, you meet several of the Critical Peer Mentor groups and participants, and hear their voices as they describe their lived experiences with CPM groups. Next, in Chapter 5, I discuss the findings from Chapter 4 and how they relate to the literature in Chapter 2. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the implications of this study and discuss the need for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

This chapter reviews the topics in the research literature that were anticipated to be seen in the data, as this is a phenomenological study. Since Critical Peer Mentor do not have a literature base, the following sections will detail various aspects or contributions that do have a literature base. These topics are teacher development, teacher identity development, agency, positioning theory, mentor teachers, peer mentoring and how CPM groups will utilize the Critical Mentoring framework. Each of these topics is discussed in turn below.

Teacher Development

Much has been written about the process of becoming a professional teacher. Throughout the history of education in the United States, the view of teachers has been transformed from the transmitters of facts and procedures to a more professional view. As professionals, teachers should possess professional judgment and make decisions based on pedagogical grounds. This requires a reflective practice which ultimately benefits the students in their classrooms (Hammerness et al., 2005; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016; Meierdirk, 2016)

In their analysis of literature regarding teacher preparation, Cochran-Smith & Villegas (2016) identified six major components of teacher development to be addressed in teacher preparation programs. The complexity of preparing teachers for their

professional classrooms involves the following: the understanding of subject matter, coursework on learning to teach, fieldwork, structures and pedagogies to address subject matter, the importance of teacher educators in the process, and the need and time to develop understandings and beliefs. As student teachers in this study, this is the dynamic in which they find themselves on their professional journey.

While the importance of subject matter and content in teacher education should not be minimalized, and because teaching is a dynamic profession, there are several factors which should simultaneously be addressed (Bransford et al., 2005). These factors speak to an adaptive expertise that supports lifelong learning (Hammerness et al., 2005). The first factor is learning to overcome what they have learned in their own educational experiences as students and to think about different ways to explain and teach content material. This is the ability to address and change one's own socialization (Jordell, 1987; Hammerness et al., 2005). The second factor to that pre-service teachers need to develop is the ability to think like a teacher and put what they have learned into action. And the third factor is learning to work in the complex environment of teaching (Hammerness et al., 2005). All of these factors require the development of pre-service teachers as reflective practitioners and collaborators (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016).

Teacher Identity Development

An important aspect of any teacher is the development of her teacher identity. While this process that is different for each teacher, because each person is unique, each teacher has a voice in her teacher identity. Utilizing narrative and storytelling, Connelly

& Clandinin (1999) illustrated the importance of listening to the voices of teachers and preservice teachers to "understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning" (p. 1). This understanding, or the need to listen to teachers and preservice teachers, has been foundational in how the education profession has come to understand teacher identity development.

In their pivotal review of literature pertaining to professional identity, Beijaard et al. (2004) reviewed relevant studies to provide a definition of teacher identity formation, as well as a detailing of the features of teachers' professional identity. The authors define teacher identity formation as "a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 123). In conjunction with this definition, the following definition is used to further make sense of professional identity development and the role it plays in understanding the development of the student teachers in this study.

> Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own views to 'how to be,' 'how to act,' and 'how to understand their work and their place in society.' Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed or imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience (Sachs, 2005, p. 15).

Additionally, Sachs (2005) states that in developing their own professional identity, teachers will apply their own experiences as a student, their professional histories, and the images they have seen in the media, etc.

Beijjard, et al (2004) state that there are four essential features of professional identity. The first feature is that professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122). This corresponds to the concept of lifelong learning, and that the process is dynamic, not stable or fixed. The authors found that two important questions to be answered in this element are "Who am I at this moment?" and "Who do I want to become?" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122).

The next feature detailed by Beijaard et al (2004) states that professional identity "implies both person and context" (p. 122). This element highlights that teachers are expected to think and behave professionally, but that there is not a single teaching culture in schools and teachers can develop their own teaching culture.

The third feature is that a professional identity "consists of sub-identities that more or less harmonize" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122). While some sub-identities may be peripheral, others will be more central to the teacher's professional identity. The authors stated that conflict between sub-identities is often experienced during initial teacher training and in student teaching. Experienced teachers my experience conflict during an educational change or a change in school environment.

The final feature provided by Beijaard et al. (2004) is agency, "meaning that teachers have to be active in the process of professional development" (p. 122). Learning, in this element, takes place through the activity of the learner, and agency will vary depending on the teacher and her goals.

This framework for teacher identity development is helpful as an introduction. However, this study specifically focuses on the agency feature, and the role it plays in teacher identity development. The following section will provide further insight into this feature.

Agency

In addition to using the definition of agency provided by Beijaard et al. (2004) in their essential features of professional identity, the following definition of agency provides further insight for as we think of agency for student teachers. It states that agency in teaching is the "quality of an individual that makes doing possible; it means believing that one's self is capable of action" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 163).

While agency is a feature of teacher identity development, it may also have a complimentary relationship, in that a strong sense of identity may lead to enacting agency. Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) state that "it is apparent that a heightened awareness of one's identity may lead to a strong sense of agency" (p. 183). Indeed, in the dialogical analysis of pre-service teachers' coursework, Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate (2016) state that the pre-service teachers are active in their own identity development. The relational identity highlights the contextualization of identity and agency, and how this

relationship should be nurtured. “The relationship between agency and professional identity suggests that within the teacher education context, pre-service teachers’ professional identity cannot be developed without the possibility for agentic action” (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016, p. 319).

The transition from student to teacher is described as a time wrought with identity changes. Beauchamp & Thomas (2011) interviewed 48 recent graduates from a teacher education program. They describe their participants understanding of agency as important and that they must develop it. They lack agency in certain contexts, while possessing agency from their experiences in teacher education or in other contexts.

Following four student teachers who were negotiating their identity, role, and agency, Sexton (2008) described seven categories of teacher role, teaching as personal, political, social, intellectual, technical, aesthetic, and employment. Utilizing these roles, the author found that the student teachers created professional identities that were consistent with his or her incoming goals, and were also shaped by the teacher education program. She also described how there is either an alignment or misalignment between the interaction of role and identity. When they aligned, there was little room for growth, but in the mis-alignment there was dissonance, which created the opportunity for the student teachers to draw on their own personal experiences and resources to provide growth. Finally, Sexton details how the student teachers’ hopes for employment shaped their participation in the program. Those who complimented the program tended to seek employment immediately after graduation, but those who were critical did not.

The construction of pre-service teachers' professional identities also seems to affect how they cope or manage during the early stages of their careers. Hong et al. (2018) describe how agency and identity during their pre-service experiences influenced the pre-service teachers during their early careers. The authors detail how the early career teachers tended to move from coping to managing, or managing to coping with the various tensions of teaching and to their perceived effectiveness in the classroom. Those with uncertain identities in the transition were strongly influence by the direct and practical support they received from their colleagues, and it was only through this support that they were able to move from coping to managing. Those pre-service teachers who were more confident tended to manage regardless of the support they received from their colleagues.

Positioning Theory

In addition to understanding teacher identity development, it is also necessary to understand positioning theory, and how this theory can illuminate the power hierarchy which exists during student teaching (Clarke et al., 2014). Positioning theory will help illuminate the power hierarchy, which is discussed next, in teacher induction.

This study utilized van Langenhove & Harré's (1999) definition of positioning theory which states that positioning is the "discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (p. 16). Put another way,

positioning is understood to be the “discursive construction of personal narrations” (Tirado & Gálvez, 2007, p. 6).

Because discourse is fluid and constantly changing, especially among different discursive partners, positioning is fluid. One, therefore, can position oneself or be positioned by another, whether that positioning is one of power or one of powerlessness (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). This assignment draws attention to the consequences that “result from and the power inherent in particular positions” (McVee, 2011, p. 15). Additionally, positioning theory proposes that while humans share a common world, they do not relate to it from the same position of power. Through different and multiple positionings, humans experiences are constituted withing different structures and representations of power (Schiller, 2016).

While positioning theory has been utilized by researchers for decades, modern applications in education have proven very effective. For example, positioning theory has been used grasp the relevant ways to be a student, specifically a competent student or a failure. This study recognized that positioning practices are experienced differently by different students occupying different positions in the classroom, and that there is an ongoing negotiation to determine what counts as failure in a specific space (Anderson, 2009).

The relationship between teacher educators and pre-service teachers has also been explored using positioning theory. Vanassche & Kelchtermans (2014) found that teacher educators’ discursive practices positioned themselves as teacher educator pedagogues,

teacher educators of reflective teachers, and teacher educators of subject teachers. This in turn influenced how the teacher educators positioned themselves with the student teachers, either as a dedicated, caring individual, a peer to the student teachers, or as a subject educator (i.e. not a teacher educator).

Utilizing positioning theory in a different manner, Scales et al. (2018) investigated how four novice teachers learned to use professional judgment in their literacy instruction. They found that the student teachers' positioning in their professional judgment was tied the alignment of their beliefs and the pedagogical practices they were being asked to use in the classroom as a student teacher. These beliefs can change through experience, and even when novice teachers position themselves as teachers in their first classrooms, they "may not be fully aware of how their judgment affects learning outcomes" (Scales et al., 2018, p.17).

Utilizing positioning theory, it is possible to see the same individual exercising more agency in one context and less in another. Kayi-Aydar (2015) explored the identity and agency of three student teachers using interviews and the pre-service teachers' journal entries. The author found that the pre-service teachers' self-positioning is different when positioning themselves with their students and mentor teachers. Relying on their own history and experiences, the student teachers positioned their students according to their linguistic needs or their sociocultural context. This, then, positioned themselves, and their teaching, as either a guide or a bridge. This self-positioning was then either in alignment or mis-alignment with their mentor teachers. The author states,

> while it is important for teacher educators to understand what identities novice teachers construct, it is also crucial for them to understand why or how those identities are constructed. Looking at the relational and oppositional identities constructed in the narrative can help teacher educators focus on the "why and how" part of identity work (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 101).

In addition to her own work using Positioning theory, Kayi-Aydar, along with Miller (2018) reviewed relevant literature detailing positioning in content classrooms, positioning in classrooms with learners of additional languages, and teacher positioning. The authors state that positioning is dynamic and can be influenced by various social categories, from either inside or outside the classroom. Additionally, teachers interact with their positioning based on their own beliefs and understanding of their professional identities.

At this point, it is important to explore additional aspects of the lived experiences of student teachers, namely, how they are growing into independent, professional teachers. While it is necessary to understand the theory behind how teachers develop and position themselves (or not) as professionals, the reality is that they are in classrooms, learning to teach. This learning involves some form of mentoring, which will be detailed in the following sections.

Mentoring

Student teaching is a time of transition for those who are learning to become teachers. Technically, they are still students and are not fully credentialed to be teachers

in their own classrooms. Yet, during their student teaching experience, they plan and enact lessons, assess students, and continue to learn what is involved in classroom teaching. In essence, they have two jobs, teaching and learning to teach (Wildman et al., 1989). Traditional education programs often rely on the expertise of cooperating teachers, or "educative mentors" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 17) to address and support student teachers in this journey, as it is difficult for university courses to cover all material (Clarke et al., 2014). Field-based experiences provide the learning where college university cannot go, and these experiences can further what they learn in their courses (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2016; Heineke & Giatsou, 2020). As such, it is important to understand the type of teacher necessary for mentoring, as well as understand the relationship between the student teacher and the mentor.

Traits of a Successful Mentor

In addition to understanding teaching and teacher learning, successful mentor teachers hold an inquiring stance. This inquiring stance allows them to find openings for productive conversations and the probing of the student teacher's thinking in order to focus on signs of growth (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Good mentor teachers also likely view themselves as learners, and when teacher learner – learner teacher relationships are viewed as a partnership, there is growth in practice by both the mentor and the student teachers, which leads to successful mentoring experience (Ellis et al., 2020; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017).

In addition to an inquiring stance, the importance of field-based learning often becomes an integral component in understanding and working with students, including multilingual learners (Heineke & Giatsou, 2020). Challenging deficit-based thinking of the students in their classroom is a component of a successful mentoring experience (Heineke & Giatsou, 2020; Vass, 2017). In addition to feedback on lesson planning, lesson delivery and classroom management, focusing on new teachers fluctuating beliefs and limited experience provides a successful mentoring experience. (Ellis et al., 2020; Callahan, 2016).

Roles of a Mentor Teacher

In addition to the aforementioned factors, mentor teachers also play multiple roles in the development of student teachers. Two of these roles enacted by mentor teachers are especially important to the success of the mentorship. Student teachers need to see models of effective teaching practices in order to add these practices to their own teaching repertoire (Matsko et al., 2020). Additionally, as a coach, the mentor gives instruction support, frequent feedback and encouragement, and an increase of autonomy in the classroom. (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Clarke et al., 2014; Matsko et al., 2020; Canipe & Gunckel, 2020).

As seen previously, induction into the norms of the profession, often rely on formal mentoring programs. In many instances of mentoring, the mentor teacher, the expert or master teacher, holds a significant amount of knowledge of content, expertise in pedagogy and the understanding of how schools and classrooms work (Clarke et al.,

2014). The mentee, or the student teacher, is viewed as the empty vessel, receiving the knowledge (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Roegman & Kolman, 2020). This relationship, however, is much more complex. Student teachers do not arrive in their classroom as blank slates. They have had experiences in their own K-12 schooling, as well as their teacher preparation program (Roegman & Kolman, 2020). This is also true for mentor teachers whose practice is "situated within, and shaped by, the contexts of both teacher preparation and K-12 education" (Roegman & Kolman, 2020, p.108). Additionally, simply being a strong teacher does not guarantee that this person will be a strong mentor and teachers are asked to mentor regardless of the deficit view they hold on their own teaching, on education, or on the teaching of the student teacher (Roegman & Kolman, 2020; Callahan, 2016; Anderson & Stillman, 2011). And, if the mentor teachers do not model effective strategies, student teachers are not able to learn from them and grow their own teaching practices (Daniel, 2014).

Negative aspects of Mentoring

Based on the previous literature, there is evidence that mentors can have a positive influence on student teachers. However, this is not always the case. In their review of more than 450 studies on cooperating teacher preparation in education, Clarke et al., (2014) found that the power hierarchy associated with classroom mentoring can create difficult circumstances for the student teachers' learning. Mentors who are not familiar with current teacher education practices can limit the student teachers' implementation of innovative practices and can create resistance to doing things differently that what the mentor does in the classroom (Vass, 2017a). There can also be a

fearful awareness of being evaluated by the mentor (Vass, 2017a), and student teachers can feel their mentors are, in fact, gatekeepers to, or from, the profession (Clarke et al., 2014).

Besides creating uneasiness, the power hierarchy between mentor and mentee can also be difficult to interrupt. What can appear to be a co-teaching or co-learning experience for the student teacher can often be interpreted as the mentor controlling the sense-making and the student teachers' ideas can be ignored (Canipe & Gunckel, 2020). Additionally, there is not much evidence that the traditional measures for becoming a mentor (e.g. tenure and years of teaching), ensure one's ability or preparedness for being a mentor to student teachers (Matsko et al., 2020). And, mentor teachers can feel that their primary task is educating students and the mentor teacher is perceived as "an aside or additional task" (Jaspers et al., 2014, p. 106).

Mentoring can also have a negative effect on the construction of teacher identity. When student teachers are not given the freedom to conduct lessons informed by their teacher education coursework, there is a disparity between the desired teacher identity, and the identity of the mentor teacher (Yuan, 2016).

While mentoring can have a positive effect on the development of student teachers, it is not always a perfect alignment. In the next section, the imbalance of the power hierarchy, as well as the misalignment of pedagogical practices, will be addressed in the discussion of peer mentoring.

Peer Mentoring

While the traditional forms of mentoring are more prevalent in education, there is a history of peer mentoring as well, although the terms have changed throughout recent history. Whether the term co-mentoring, mutual mentoring, collaborative mentoring, or critical constructivist mentoring is used, all of the terms refer teachers giving and receiving support from the peers to promote professional dialogue and change (Le Cornu, 2005). The common component in all peer mentoring is that the parties involved in the peer mentoring are positioned as co-learners or co-constructors of knowledge, thus pushing against the traditional power hierarchies (Le Cornu, 2005).

In order for peer mentoring to be effective for pre-service teachers, there are three components that should be stressed during the teacher preparation program. These components are a synthesis of Le Cornu (2005) review of the history of peer mentoring. The first is a mentoring attitude which values one's own learning while at the same time valuing the learning of others. In what many consider an individualistic profession, this can be difficult for pre-service teachers to feel some responsibility for their peers' learning. Next, teacher education should develop interpersonal skills so that teachers are able to work with adults as well as with children. This includes an element of trust as well as an ability to deal with conflicts.

The final component for peer mentoring is the development of critical reflection skills. For this component, the pre-service teachers should learn to reflect on, and question, their beliefs as well as the assumptions of others, in an effort to uncover values

and interests served (or not) by education. This component is underpinned by a strong commitment to social justice (Le Cornu, 2005).

The following studies illustrate creative use of peer mentors in education al settings. First, evidence of the element of social justice is seen in Behizadeh, Thomas and Cross (2019), who utilize critical friends groups with their racially diverse, middle school student teachers. By focusing on practice dilemmas brought to their *critical friends* groups, the student teachers were able to reframe many of the deficit-based issues surrounding their students using collaborative reflection. Second, Korhonen et al. (2017) detail student teachers' experiences as the participated in mixed peer mentor groups, or groups that contained both pre-service and in-service teachers. The findings varied from the student teachers appreciating the casual time they had with their peers to collaborative and constructive learning deemed as professional development. The authors state that further use of this type of group should place more emphasis on the integration of theory and practice.

Critical Peer Mentors

The motivation for this study was the book Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide by Torie Weiston-Serdan (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Critical mentoring is defined as an "approach that puts youth themselves and their marginalization front and center and requires mentors and those interacting with youth to challenge the status quo" (Weiston-Serdan, 2017, p.ix). It is a mentoring augmented by critical consciousness. While the focus of this book is to provide a practical guide to better mentoring youth of Color, there

is much to be learned from the advice given for critical mentoring, especially for teachers of diverse students to build awareness around the social, political and racial struggles surrounding language (García & Kleifgen, 2018). The following list details the insights that led to what I am calling Critical Peer Mentors, a form of mentoring to be used with pre-service teachers to critically support and challenge each other to do better for all students.

1. Youth have voice, power and choice. They are capable, let them lead.
2. Mentoring is reciprocal.
3. Mentoring is a collaborative partnership.
4. When mentoring, understand the context.
5. Mentoring should focus on Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

This framework was used in several ways in this study. First, Weiston-Serdan states that youth have voice, power and choice. In this study, this was manifested twofold: 1.the voice of the student teachers and the direction of their learning and 2.the voice of the students in their classrooms. Learning to hear and understand the voices of their students is a skill that the student teachers should possess prior to leaving TLTE. Second, the focus on Critical Race Theory is the lens through which some of the readings and the questions asked of the student teachers, either directly through feedback from their professor or through the questions asked to the student teaching group as a whole. While

this course was student-led, the instructor was not dismissed from the process. Centering the students was the enactment of CRT while providing them an environment to continue their growth and understanding of the complexities of their students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Additionally, the focus of Critical Mentoring is to provide same-race mentors with mentees. Weiston-Serdan discusses the hero complex of white mentors with marginalized youth. This power differential mimics the same power differential seen in many classrooms, especially between white teachers and marginalized children and youth and thus, the need for critical awareness by teachers. It was the intent of this study to better equip pre-service teachers with the skills needed to better educate all their students, with the hope of empowering their students to use their power and voice. However, it is also important to realize that the student teachers may not be adequately equipped to do so, which is discussed next.

Race evasion

Colorblind racism or race-evasion refers to the continued denials by White people that race is a crucial social phenomenon (Jupp, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This denial can range from denying that a person "sees" race to the utilization of race-evasive discursive strategies. These discursive strategies can include, among others, outright denial of race, defensive silences, the conflation of race for class. The denial then perpetuates the reproduction of social inequities which views race as a person of Color's individual deficit or weaknesses (Jupp, 2020).

Applying colorblindness to the U.S. Constitution, Gotanda (1991) disputed the use of the term colorblind, stating that a color-blind racial ideology disregarded the realities faced in the lives of people of Color. This sentiment was furthered by Annamma et al. (2013), who utilized DisCrit to illustrate how colorblindness "conflates lack of eyesight with lack of knowing. Said differently, the inherent ableism in this term equates blindness with ignorance" (p. 154).

In the field of education, Jupp (2017) uses race evasion and his personal life history reflection to stress the importance of re-coding cherished knowledge (racialized curriculum) by White pre-service and in-service teachers. He reinforces the need for race-visible teaching in teacher education to strive for anti-racist curriculum.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This study utilized phenomenology in two distinct ways. First, phenomenology used as a theory, a lens through which to view and understand the phenomena, the lived experience, being studied. At its core, phenomenology is "originally and essentially a philosophical discipline (Van Manen, 2014, p. 22). The second is phenomenology as a methodology, the necessary steps to take in order to explore the phenomenon being studied. In this section, phenomenology as a theory is discussed in order to complete the theoretical framework of this study. Phenomenology as the methodology will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In phenomenological philosophy, a phenomenon is the essence of something as it is described, how it functions in the lived experience, and how this essence then appears

in consciousness as an object of reflection (Moustakas, 1994;Van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021). Martin Heideggar (1889-1976) created the version of phenomenology used in this study, hermeneutic phenomenology, after studying under Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) because he believed that a large component of Husserl's philosophy was problematic. Husserl believed that you could exclude the researcher from the process of understanding, a process known as bracketing. While Heideggar is credited for the challenging the exclusion of the researcher, others have further developed this belief that researchers cannot exclude themselves from the research, as we are always in existence with others in our experiences in the world (Moustakas, 1994;Van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021).

The element of *dasein*, meaning 'being there,' is what is believed to be impossible to separate the self from being within the world (Moustakas, 1994; Gadamer, 2004; Van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021). In other words, each person is *dasein*, and as such, the circumstances of each other's existence cannot be separated from each other. Additionally, each person comes to a situation with fore-conceptions, or what Gadamer (2004) called pre-understandings, and each person will modify one's own understanding by a constant process of interpretation. In order to understand or interpret something, this preconceived knowledge, whether it is a bias, a judgment or an understanding, will be continually revised (Moustakas, 1994; Gadamer, 2004; Van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021). This belief is embraced in this study in that, as the researcher, I used my previous knowledge of teaching to better understand the phenomenon.

The process of constant revision in phenomemology in order to gain understanding is called the hermeneutic circle (Moustakas, 1994; Gadamer, 2004; Van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021). Hermeneutics places "the interpretation of the text in the context of one's own social-historical existence" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 137). Gadamer (2004) furthered this by stating that each round of understanding is viewed through a lens, and each lens is created anew as the process of interpretation continues. The hermeneutic circle guides the interpretation through the circle, enabling the understanding to grow and become more complete with each additional interpretation. This knowledge, as all human understanding, occurs in dialogue which is informed by pre-judgments or prejudice (Van Manen, 2014). The previously described philosophical underpinning informs the methodological process described in Chapter 3.

Summary

This chapter detailed the applicable literature needed to situate this study in its current context. Because student teaching is at the intersection of teacher education and professional licensure, multiple components were discussed, including teacher development and the various forms of mentoring. This chapter also discussed the three theoretical frameworks which will form the hermeneutic circle used for data analysis which is detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I present the research methods design and rationale, including my role as the researcher. Additionally, I discuss the selection of the participants, the data collection and stages of analysis, and conclude with the discussion of ethics and validity.

Design and Rationale

For this study, I used a phenomenological methodology which allowed me to provide rich descriptions of lived experiences of the phenomena of Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups. As stated in Chapter 2, I used hermeneutic phenomenology: phenomenology because I have described the lived experiences of the student teachers who have participated in the phenomena, the CPM groups; hermeneutic because I did not eliminate myself from the analysis; and hybrid because I utilized additional theoretical frameworks (Teacher Identity Development and Positioning Theory) as lenses through which to interpret the data.

Researcher Role

Throughout this study, I was a participant observer. This role took several forms. Prior to the beginning of the semester and data collection, I became a thought partner for the student teaching seminar, TEAC 403A (the course in which the CPM groups were placed), with Dr. Tricia Gray. Dr. Gray and I have a previous professional relationship working on a federally-funded grant together. It was through this work, in addition to

both teaching in the same university department, that we had many discussions about teaching, learning, and the future of our profession. As our conversations continued and turned to the research for this dissertation, the CPM groups became a component of TEAC 403A, thus enabling this study to occur. As thought partners, we discussed the need for student teachers to have the opportunity to discuss difficult topics with their peers. In this capacity, I was also a sounding board for the choice of readings and videos for the assignments, described further in the data collection portion of this chapter.

In addition to our meetings where I was a thought partner with Dr. Gray, I also attended all five of the student teaching seminars throughout the semester. These seminars brought the student teachers together virtually for two hours each time. I took notes during the seminars which included discussions about how student teaching was progressing for the student teachers, activities to encourage their deeper thinking regarding teaching, and guest speakers who provided job-search information and applying for their professional licensure, to name a few. Finally, I observed the capstone projects that each CPM group presented at the end of the semester. I did not assess the capstone projects, nor did I participate in any of the grading throughout the semester.

Positionality

For the past twenty-five years, I have identified as a teacher, and still do, although my teaching has taken a significant turn in the last ten years when I moved from the K-12 setting to the university setting. I am a white, middle-class female, which is the same race, class and gender of approximately 80% of all teachers (McFarland et al., 2019), and

the same race, gender, and class description of most of the participants in this study. I have been interested in working with pre-service teachers since the first time that I mentored a student teacher in my classroom. I am dedicated to help pre-service teachers become their best teaching selves, by encouraging them to become life-long learners, and by realizing both their strengths and areas for growth.

My professional journey to this point, however, has been a winding path of learning and growth. I am not the same teacher that I was at the start of my career. Like many of the student teachers in this study, I did not grow up surrounded by diversity. The small town where I grew up had few black families and no immigrant families. Interestingly, my love of language began in my small town when I began to learn Spanish in high school. Through language, I learned and explored cultures that were so different than mine. In college, I continued to learn more about other cultures, but it wasn't until I studied in Spain that I began to know my true self.

When I returned to college to get certified to teach, I began to learn more about race, but only through the lens of language, as I was getting certified in Spanish, but also ESL (that term certainly indicates the timeframe in which I was studying). During my years in the classroom, the highlights are marked by students, mostly multilingual students, who taught me about who they were, and what they needed from me as a teacher.

Sadly, it was not until I began work on my doctorate degree that I learned to not only understand the race and culture of my students, but also the need to dive deeply into

my own race, culture, and lived experiences. My learning has pushed my thinking into directions that I could have never anticipated, and I found myself thinking about and critically reflecting on my previous teaching. This revealed difficult realities for me to wrap my head around, and I wasn't happy with my discoveries. It is through this lens that I can relate to, and empathize with, the student teachers in this study. As a teacher educator, I have learned the need to confront my whiteness to address the needs of the students that my own students will be teaching in the future. I empathize with the journey that the student teachers are on, but their growth and transformation are crucial to meet the educational needs of all their students. It is through my own journey that I understand where the student teachers' journey more clearly.

Participants

The participants in this study were UNL students who were enrolled in the Student Teaching Seminar (TEAC 403A) and were in their last semester of the Elementary Education program in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. They completed their student teaching during spring semester 2021. Potential participants received the recruitment email through Canvas (Appendix B). Participants self-selected into this study and all students in the Student Teaching Seminar received the recruitment email. During the first student teaching seminar, held synchronously online, I explained the study and sent the Informed Consent (Appendix C) to all of the students through DocuSign. Of the 86 student teachers, 29 returned their Informed Consent to me through DocuSign.

Throughout the semester, I read the consented student teachers' written reflections and Perusall discussions (described below), as well as watched the recordings of their Critical Peer Mentor group meetings. Based on their written reflections four and five, which discussed their emerging teacher identity, I did initial coding using teacher identity development and positioning theory as lenses. I also created a spreadsheet which indicated the student teachers' district and school placement, as well as grade level, to ensure that the interview participants would be from a range of schools, districts and grade levels. Upon completion of the initial coding and with the aid of the spreadsheet, I made purposive selection of 18 participants and requested to interview them. The 18 participants were chosen because they represented a wide variety of districts, schools, grades. Additionally, I chose these 18 because they represented a wide variety of statements regarding their teacher identity development. Of the 18 invitations, 15 student teachers agreed to be interviewed. Due to the amount of data, and the ability to triangulate between the interviews and coursework, these 15 participants became the focus of this study. All participant were White females. Demographic information about the 15 participants is expressed in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Participant	Race	CPM Group	District Type	Grade	Profiled in Chapter 4
Sadie	White	A	Large urban	K	Yes
Madelyn	White	A	Large urban	3	No
Elaine	White	A	Small community	2	Yes
Natalie	White	B	Rural	K	No
Olivia*	White	C	Suburban	1	No
Grace	White	C	Suburban	1	No
Lillian	White	D	Private & small community	4 & SpEd	No
Victoria	White	E	Large Urban	K & pEd	No
Emma	White	E	Large urban	3 & SpEd	No
Claire	White	F	Texas, large urban	4 & SpEd	Yes
Riley	White	F	Texas, large urban	1	Yes
Sophia*	White	F	Texas, large urban	2	No
Caroline*	White	G	Large urban	1	Yes
Elizabeth*	White	H	Suburban	3	No
Bella	White	H	Large urban	3	No

Notes: The participants in this chart represent 8 different CPM groups. Except when noted, the participants student taught in the Midwest. * denotes participation in focus group.

Data Collection Points

In order to collect rich descriptions of student teachers' experiences of CPM, this study encompassed the entire semester of participants' student teaching and included several data points within the semester. Data collected in this study included coursework from the student teachers' seminar (TEAC 403A), individual interviews, focus group, and researcher notes. Each is discussed in turn below.

Student teaching seminar (TEAC 403A)

During their student teaching experience, each of the student teachers was also enrolled in a 3-hour student teaching seminar. The complete syllabus and modules detail can be found in Appendices D and E. The course description states that this course addresses different issues that complement the pre-service teaching experience and facilitates the development of a reflective capstone project (discussed below). The following were the course goals for the student teachers: reflect on their development as an educator; increase awareness and development of their teacher identity; develop skills as a critical peer mentor who supports and challenges peers; build an enduring and sustainable collaborative of critical peer mentors; analyze artifacts to systematically reflect on growth as an educator; and to show competency as a reflective, collaborative, and professional educator through a presentation.

Important insight into this course is evidenced by Dr. Gray's statement of on equity and inclusion in her course policies. It states

> Every person in this course matters, and we all grow from the unique backgrounds and experiences each person brings to this course. Actions that attempt to exclude others cannot be tolerated; however, ideas grounded in misinformation or hate also cannot be tolerated. I hope that we will all strive to co-construct a class culture in which we view one another as humans worthy of dignity and respect, regardless of and perhaps because of the differences among us.

This course was organized on Canvas, where the student teachers received all of their assignment details and submitted all of their assignments, with the exception of the Perusall annotations. The Perusall annotations were completed on the Perusall website, through a secure access set up by Dr. Gray.

Throughout the semester, the student teachers met as a whole group online (on Zoom) five times during the semester, roughly every two weeks, for two hours each time. During these meetings, the student teachers participated in activities to encourage deeper thinking on their student teaching experience, receive information from the university, ask questions, and come together as a community of support.

During the sixth seminar meeting, the student teachers presented their capstone projects on Zoom to faculty and peers from other CPM groups. Each project was completed in their CPM groups, and contained both individual and group information and growth. The capstone project for this course meets the university's ACE 10 assignment, which is a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and

reflection. The faculty evaluated the projects using a single point rubric, utilizing the criteria for ACE 10. Details for the capstone project and rubric are in Appendices K and L.

Course assignments

Course assignments were collected from all consenting study participants and participation in this study was not part of the course grade. The Course Syllabus and Modules are included in the Appendix D and E. Reflections, reading or video annotations, personal reflections, and Capstone projects were the course assignments used as data, especially for triangulation with the individual interview and focus group data. Descriptions of the course assignments follow:

Critical Peer Mentor group recording. At the beginning of the semester, all of the student teachers, completed a Google Form (Appendix F) which asked them questions to inform the creation of their own Critical Peer Mentor groups. Dr. Gray and I formed the groups using their answers. Their input was important in order to follow the guidelines set by Weisten-Serdon in critical mentoring: youth have voice, power and choice. They are capable and we should let them lead (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Once the Critical Peer Mentor groups were formed, they met on Zoom for approximately one hour during each of the modules. For each meeting, the CPM group was given a possible discussion starter in their seminar, but they also had flexibility to discuss the topics which they were finding important in their student teaching experiences. Many of the groups began each meeting with ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ for the time since their last meeting. Each of

these meetings was recorded and submitted as an assignment on Canvas. I took observation notes while viewing their meetings, coding general topics and only quoting consenting participants.

Reading or video annotation. Each module, the CPM groups chose an article or video (complete list and description in Appendix I) to watch or read together in Perusall, an annotation application which can be embedded in Canvas. The student teachers made comments, highlighted, raised questions, and made connections on the article or video as a CPM group. If they felt that they needed to discuss this further, they addressed this during their CPM group meeting. I took observation notes while reading these annotations, coding general topics and only quoting consenting participants.

Reflective journal entry. Each module, the student teachers were asked to write a reflective journal entry about their student teaching. Each entry had several Guiding Questions (Appendix J) and they were also encouraged to write additional insights into their growing professionalism and/or classroom.

Capstone Project recordings. Each CPM group presented their growth and learning through their Capstone Project, using their own work as evidence of their learning. The assignment detail is in Appendix K and the Single Point Rubric is in Appendix L. These presentations were presented on Zoom for faculty and their student teaching peers. I took observation notes while viewing the Capstone recordings, noting general topics and only quoting consenting participants.

Semi-structured Individual Interview

In addition to completing the course assignments, selected participants (see Participants section) were asked to complete one individual interview. Individual interviews attempted to understand the world from the point of view of the participants, gaining insight into the meaning of their experience in their lived world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, individual interviews were used to gain insight into how the participants of this study experienced CPM groups. I organized the interview questions by themes with each theme providing a layer of understanding of the CPM groups, and when taken together, provided a thick description of the experience of CPM groups. The themes were the CPM group itself, peer mentoring, cooperating teacher and student teaching experience, the future and values of CPM groups. The complete protocol for the individual interview is located in Appendix M.

The interviews took place at the end of the semester after the Capstone presentations but before graduation, at the convenience of the participants. Fifteen of the consented participants completed the individual interview.

Semi-structured Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews provide distinct perspectives compared to individual interviews because interactions with others may encourage deeper discussions of shared experiences. Focus groups create a different dynamic and provide the opportunity to "challenge participants to reconsider or intensify personal views" (Peoples, 2021, p. 56). I designed the focus group questions to highlight different aspects of CPM groups

compared to the individual interview questions. These questions also provided opportunities for comparison and contrast between the different CPM groups by the participants. The themes for the focus groups were the interactions of the CPM group, difficult topics, and relationships with cooperating teachers. The Focus Group Protocol is located in Appendix N.

Upon completion of the individual interviews, all 15 participants were invited to participate in a focus group interview. This second recruitment took place after graduation making the availability of the participants limited due to summer employment, moving to their new location for their recently accepted teaching position, and various other reasons. Ultimately, I was able to recruit four participants to form one focus group. The four focus group participants were members of different CPM groups.

Researcher Notes and Observation Memos

The final point of data for this study is my researcher notes. As a participant observer, I attended all required student teaching seminars. During this time, I took notes regarding the discussion and activities occurring during seminar. My notes and the artifacts created during the activities are included in the data set. I also took notes during each meeting with Dr. Gray as well as when I was observing videos and reading Perusall annotations. Handwritten notes were typed and stored as data on my laptop.

Data collection

Data collection for this study took place in phases. The following details what occurred during each phase in turn.

Phase 1

Phase 1 occurred during the Spring 2021 semester. All assignments from the 29 consenting participants were downloaded into a shared Box folder by Dr. Gray. I read and de-identified each assignment. I also watched the Critical Peer Mentor group recordings and took notes regarding the insights of the participants. This phase also included the whole group seminars, which I attended as a participant observer.

Additionally, this phase included the Capstone Presentations. I observed the presentations, and the presentations were also recorded on Zoom. Zoom transcribed the videos and I verified the transcriptions. Throughout the duration of Phase 1, I journaled according to hermeneutic phenomenology in order to make my biases explicit. See Appendix H for samples of this journaling

Phase 2

Phase 2 included the individual interviews. These were scheduled during the week following the Capstone presentations, May 1-7, 2021. These interviews took place on Zoom and lasted between 30-60 minutes. The participants received a secure link, following IRB protocols. There were no problems with the links or access to the Zoom meeting. At the completion of 14 of the interviews, Zoom transcribed the interview and I verified the transcription making changes as needed, as well as removed all of the Zoom time stamps and codes. With Lillian's interview, Zoom did not properly save the transcription. For this interview, I submitted the video to Sonix, an AI transcription

service, who then provided the transcript. I also verified this transcript for accuracy. The use of Sonix as a possible transcription service is also in the IRB for this study.

Phase 3

Phase 3 included the focus group interview. This was scheduled following the individual interviews. Focus group interview took place on Zoom on May 25, 2021. The focus group consisted of four participants, although one joined the Zoom call 10 minutes late due to a work commitment. All four were in different CPM groups. Zoom transcribed the interview and I verified the transcription making changes as needed, as well as removed all of the Zoom time stamps and codes.

Data analysis procedures

An important component of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology is journaling. This step is used to make explicit my personal biases and used to "concentrate on the data during ceaseless distractions and biases that are continually created within" (Peoples, 2021, p. 65). The purpose was to replace my current conceptions with ones that align with the data. Personal biases can create questions necessary for thought revision which should be addressed through the hermeneutic circle until "an agreement of meaning is clarified" (Gadamer, 2004). I journaled prior to each step during data analysis. See Appendix H for journaling examples.

Data analysis for this study followed the process of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is the description of the process of understanding the data (Peoples, 2021). I adapted the spiraling circle below to indicate the levels and order of analysis

(*Hermeneutics*, 2020). As Heidegger described, interpretation is a constant revision (Peoples, 2021). The spiral of this diagram, for me, represents the constant revisions while continuing to move forward toward an understanding.

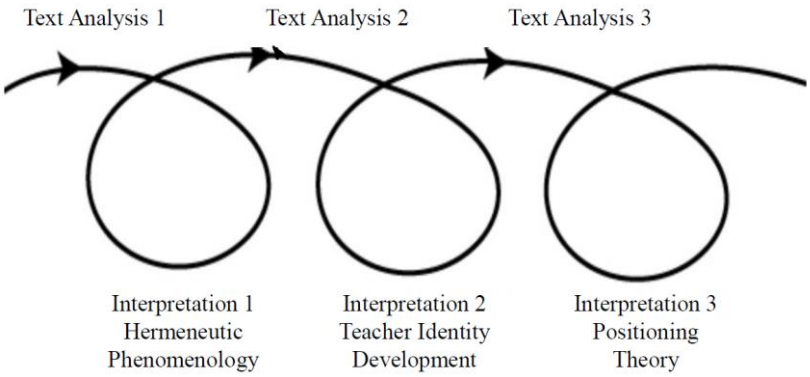

Figure 1 Hermeneutic circle for this study

Understanding the lenses through which I analyzed will illustrate my use of the hermeneutic circle. First, with each element of data, I read to understand the lived experience of the student teacher in that moment. After gaining insight into their lived experience, I read the data again to understand whether it was illuminating elements of teacher identity development. For example, was there evidence of agency, sub-identities, context, etc. And last, I re-read the data a third time to understand the positioning of the student teacher at that moment. For example, I looked for evidence of how they were positioning themselves, or how they were positioned by others. Positioning theory gave me insight into the mentor/mentee relationships, peer relationships, and the power hierarchy discussed in Chapter 2.

In addition to the application of the hermeneutic circle, the following steps provide additional guidance into the process of data analysis for this study (Peoples, 2021, p.59-62).

Step 1

Read and deleted irrelevant information from the transcripts (ex. um, uh, etc.), time stamps, etc. and verified the accuracy of the transcript, making changes as needed.

Step 2

Created preliminary "meaning units" while concentrating on the research topic. A meaning unit is the allocation piece of data that reveals a feature or trait of the phenomenon being investigated (Peoples, 2021).

Step 3

Broke down all the preliminary meaning unites to final meaning units (or themes), informed by my deepened understanding of each participant's description.

Step 4

Organized specific stories and experiences thematically under the specific interview questions. Highlighted each participant's experience through direct quotes from the interviews.

Step 5

Created general narratives from the situated narratives, unifying participants' accounts into a general description of all the participants' narratives. This organized the

data from the situated narratives while highlighting all of the participants' meanings of their experiences.

Step 6

United the major phenomenological themes into a cohesive general description. Discussed the themes that were implicit in all or most of the participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Step 7

After completion of the findings and discussion, I received feedback from a reader regarding the absence of race from the findings. At that time, I re-analyzed the interviews, using searches for race, black, white, and Title I. I also re-analyzed the Perusall data, searching form the same terms in the annotations.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established two different ways in this study. First, I corroborated evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources, specifically, course assignments, individual interviews, the focus group interview, and through my observation notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once a theme was established in one source, I looked for similar evidence of said theme in other sources, providing a thick description of the phenomena. I did not conduct member checks with the participants, as I was extremely worried about their stress levels during their first year of teaching and did not want to add an additional layer of stress.

Second, I engaged in reflexivity and clarified my own bias, bringing to the forefront my experiences as a teacher and teacher educator (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By journaling throughout this study, especially during data analysis, I have acknowledged how my previous experiences have served to inform, rather than discredit, the findings of this study.

Ethics

The study described herein was approved by UNL's IRB (Appendix A) on December 4, 2020. Confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the duration of this study. No participants chose to leave this study, however, due to scheduling conflicts, some participants chose not to participate in the individual interviews and the focus group. There were no conflicts of interest and no incentives were provided for participation.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie within its methodological weaknesses. There were 86 student teachers enrolled in the student teacher seminar, TEAC 403A, and of those students, only 29 consented to participate in this study. This is a relatively small percentage of participants. Additionally, those who consented were all female students. None of the male students agreed to participate in this study, as such, male voices were not represented in the data set.

In order to make the number of interviews manageable, I needed to reduce the number of consenters. As described in the participants section, I invited 18 consenters to

interview, and 15 completed the individual interviews. While I followed a self-designed method of selection, journaled prior to reading assignments and finally making the selection, the choice inevitably involved some personal choice, which could be problematic, thus making this a limitation.

Another limitation in this study was time. According to the IRB for this study, the data was to be collected and completed during the Spring 2021 semester. This is a short time frame and could potentially limit the findings. This also put a time constraint on the timing of the interviews and the focus group as the participants completed their student teaching, graduated and began the transition to their professional jobs. This made scheduling difficult and limited the number of consented participants who could ultimately participate.

Summary

This chapter has provided the necessary details for the methodology of this study. This has included a description of the participants, data, analysis. Chapter 4 will detail the findings generated by this study.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study to answers the research question, what are the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor groups? The student teachers experienced their CPM group as a venue for composing a network of critical peers, for amplifying their access to veteran cooperating teachers and for embedding collaboration into their teaching lives. Each of these three major findings is discussed in turn below. First, though, a description of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research study and participants is provided, followed by profiles of select CPM groups and participants.

The effects of COVID-19 during teacher preparation

Well before their student teaching experience, the student teachers in this study felt the effects of COVID-19. During normal teacher preparation, the methods classes are held on campus to facilitate collaboration during their learning. However, in March 2020, about halfway through the Spring 2020 semester, the university shut down and all in-person university classes were switched to online due to the pandemic. This drastically changed the culture of the teacher education program, forcing all collaboration to occur online or not at all.

Many of the teacher education courses also have practicum experiences associated with them. These practicum experiences are times when the pre-service teachers spend time in classrooms, learning and practicing the teaching skills they are learning in their

methods courses. These in-person practicum experiences were abruptly stopped when local public schools also switched their classroom learning to online. Some practicum experiences were able to be switched to online, but not all. Nonetheless, their normal practicum experiences were not had.

The Fall 2020 semester was also impacted by COVID-19. Some university classes met in-person, but restrictions were placed on how many students could be in each classroom, and desks were spread out to ensure social distancing. Masks were required to be worn at all times on campus. Classes were often hybrid, meaning that some students were in-person while others were online. Some classes had students work online asynchronously when they were not in person. Practicum experiences were often online or inconsistent when in-person. So, going into their student teaching experience, this group of student teachers had had a highly irregular teacher education experience.

Student teaching during a pandemic

Traditional student teaching is a semester-long placement in a school where teacher learners apprentice alongside an experienced cooperating teacher (CT). However, for the participants in this study, their student teaching semester was anything but traditional or ‘normal. These participants completed their student teaching during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Besides their normal apprenticeship of writing and presenting lessons, the student teachers had additional requirements placed upon them to keep themselves and their students safe. This included COVID-19 testing every two weeks, with the results submitted to the placement office. Student teachers with positive

results were required to quarantine, thus missing instructional time in their placement classrooms. Additionally, the majority of student teachers were required to wear facial masks at all times while in their schools. Throughout the semester, both student teachers and cooperating teachers were sometimes suddenly absent for days due to COVID-19. In short, due to the pandemic this student teaching semester was unlike most.

This semester also occurred during the presidential transition from Donald Trump to Joe Biden. The country saw periods of civil unrest, including an insurrection at the U.S. Capital building and the first non-peaceful transition of power in the history of the United States.

In addition to COVID-19, the group of student teachers in Texas dealt with a severe winter storm which caused week-long power outages, water shortages, and gasoline shortages. School was canceled during this time. The student teachers' living conditions became difficult, having no water, electricity (which meant no heat) and even getting to the grocery store to get food was problematic. As such, the student teachers left the state for a week until they could return and safely continue their student teaching.

The challenges the student teachers faced during this semester were unusual, providing an important context for the CPM groups. These challenges were present in many forms during the semester, including the CPM group meetings, reflections, and additional assignments.

An introduction to the CPM groups

Prior to the beginning of the semester, each of the student teachers completed a Google Form questionnaire (Appendix F). Each student teacher preferenced the top three ways in which they wanted to be grouped. Their choices were; same school, same district, same grade level, peers who are good thought partners, and peers who express the same topics of interest. Using these preferences, Dr. Gray and I created 14 CPM groups, each having between five and seven student teachers. As a result of the preferences, there were groups who had a variety of grades, schools, and districts represented. There were also groups whose members were all placed in the same district, the same grade level, one group consisted of special education/elementary dual majors, and one group whose members were all placed in Catholic schools.

Each group was required to have a bi-weekly CPM meeting, for a total of five meetings. These meetings were held on Zoom at the convenience of the group, with a due date given by Dr. Gray by which time the group needed to have their meeting recording uploaded to their university Box folder (a secure document sharing and storage site). The duration of the meetings was between 30-60 minutes.

Each group had its own dynamic due to its unique membership. Each group shared their successes during the semester, from a successful lesson, a breakthrough with a student, or the receiving of a job offer for the next academic year. Each group also had challenges and conflict throughout the semester, and each group resolved the problems by talking through the issues through a variety of media, which is discussed at more

length below. Following are three representative CPM group profiles, each of which has multiple participants of this study.

Meet group A

Group A was composed of four members who identified each other as desirable thought partners, in other words, they chose each other for their CPM group. One additional member was added to this group by Dr. Gray. Of the five members in this group, three were participants in this study (Elaine, Sadie, and Madelyn). Sadie, Madelyn, and one other member were placed in a large, metropolitan district. Elaine was placed in a rural district, and one other member was placed in a suburban district. Sadie, Elaine and two other group members knew each other well from previous courses. Madelyn was originally placed in another group but asked to be switched to a different group due to a personality conflict with one of the members of her original group.

The bi-weekly meeting times proved to be a challenge for this group. Two of the members worked full-time while they were student teaching, and the other members had part-time jobs. Their online meeting times were usually in the evening, with at least one member joining from her evening job. The members of this group took turns with the responsibility of recording their meeting and uploading the recording to their university Box folder.

Group A started each of their CPM meetings with highs and lows of the past two weeks. This time lasted a significant portion of their meetings. Here, they celebrated each other's successes, and they also helped and encouraged each other by giving advice

during the lows. This is the time that they often asked specific questions and sought advice from their group members. They also used this time to talk about some topics in which they disagreed, for example COVID-19 mask mandates, COVID-19 vaccinations, and the political climate. Elaine described these conversations by saying

> We were able to have like those adult conversations and be respectful, and take a different approach and understand why they felt the way they did about something. So it was really it was really neat to see that, because I feel like right now in the world we're not able to see a lot of people respect other people with varying opinions. So, I loved that, you know, we all share the same core of loving children and wanting to educate the future but that we're still able to have our own personalities and be able to have those conversations that are typically taboo and difficult**.**

To complete the final portion of their meetings, Group A discussed the Perusall article or video that they had annotated together. This brought about deeper discussion as they connected the article or video to their student teaching classrooms. Each of the members chose one items for annotation during the semester.

Group A's meetings were very informal and often had interruptions due the environment from where they were joining the meeting. While four of the members of this group new each other previously, a strong friendship was created by this group during the semester. Madelyn, who originally joined as an outsider to this group of friends, was fully embraced as a group member. In her interview, Madelyn stated, "I do see myself remaining friends with my current CPM group as well, wherever we go." The

three participants in this study described how important this group was to their successful completion of their student teaching experience.

Meet Group F

Group F was formed using the preference that the student teachers wanted to be grouped by district. There were six members in this group, three of which were participants in this study (Claire, Riley, and Sophia). All six members of this group were placed in a large, metropolitan district in Texas. This district had an agreement with the university, which regularly places student teachers in this district at the request of the student teachers. The student teachers are paid for their time in the schools and the district provided housing during their student teaching experience. Claire, Riley and Sophia were roommates and student taught in the same school. The other three members of this group were also roommates and student taught in another school in the district.

For their bi-weekly Zoom meetings, Group F met just prior to the due date for the submission of their recordings. They usually met with three of the members on one Zoom camera and the other three on another one, each group in their own apartment. The meetings were very informal with no set order for discussion. They usually discussed what had been going on the past couple of weeks, what they were each doing, and how they were feeling. If no one was talking, Sophia usually asked a question to start the conversation. Claire was responsible for submitting the recording of the meeting and was also the person who made sure that they had completed all that they needed to do for that session.

Riley, Claire and Sophia all described how thankful they were that they lived together and became close friends. They used their time together, especially during dinner, to process a lot of their student teaching experiences. Riley had a very difficult relationship with her CT, and described her roommates support for her as her "therapy group." The three participants also voiced concern that the other three members of their CPM group had voiced early in their student teaching that they were having doubts about becoming teachers and were very reluctant to take over teaching duties. Riley stated that she "just wanted to see them [the other three] grow. I wanted them to jump in." Although they were in the same city, they never got together face-to-face with the other three group members.

Additionally, Group F experienced a huge winter storm while they were in Texas, as discussed previously. Riley, Claire, and Sophia left Texas when living conditions became too difficult and went to New Orleans. This was a large gap in their student teaching, and all three discussed how they would have like to have more time in the classroom.

Meet Group H

Group H was formed using the preferences that the student teachers wanted to be grouped as thought partners and also by grade level. There were six members in this group, two of which were participants in this study (Elizabeth and Bella). Four of the group members were placed in a large, metropolitan district. The other two members

were placed in two different suburban school districts. All of the student teachers taught second and third grade in their schools.

The bi-weekly Zoom meetings were very orderly for this group. One person took care of the recording and uploading of the meeting each time. They started with ‘roses and thorns’, their version of highs and lows, and were methodical in making sure that everyone had a turn to speak. They shared advice freely, and all member’s voices were heard throughout the meeting. They spent a large amount of time each meeting discussing their Perusall annotations. They were democratic in choosing the article or video to annotate next, making sure that each member was comfortable with the choice that had been agreed upon. Elizabeth described her view of the CPM meetings as

> And at first, I thought, like an hour every two weeks, like that's a long time to be meeting with a group. But, after those first three weeks of school being into teaching but not having anything at UNL, I felt very disconnected from college and just felt kind of lonely, like nobody to talk to you, other than those at my school. And I didn't have anybody [at her school] that was, again, exactly where I am in my journey until we started meeting. Like, I could talk to them for more than an hour, because I had somebody to talk to you about any issues I was having at school or just brainstorming ideas on classroom management and brain breaks.

The member of Group H had known each other previously as acquaintances in class. They stated that they shared similar teaching philosophies and had similar

personalities, which helped their group to run smoothly. This group's struggle throughout the semester was being able to share their job search successes without hurting other group member's feelings. Several members voiced a great deal of stress about not getting interviews or job positions throughout the semester. But, Elizabeth had not only received her job offer prior to beginning student teaching, she was also accepted into a mentoring program at another university through which she would receive her master's degree. Additionally, one of the group members had not been accepted into the program. As other group members slowly began to get interviews while others did not, this was a source of stress in their meetings. Ultimately, all member of this group received job offers, but this was an area of growth for them in their professional development.

Having described three representative CPM groups, I now introduce several of the participants whose voices are heard throughout the findings.

Meet a few of the participants

In this section, I provide individual profiles for five of the participants. All of the participants in this study were white females. These participants were chosen because their voices are prominent in the data. Additionally, they represent the sentiment of many of the participants who are not individually profiled.

Caroline

Caroline describes herself as positive, bubbly, and outgoing who has always loved learning. She grew up in an affluent suburb, attending public schools with very little racial or religious diversity. She completed her student teaching in 1st grade at a Title I

school in a large, metropolitan district. She had a wonderful relationship with her CT, stating “she was seriously just the best. She would text me randomly on the weekends and, just be like, I hope you're enjoying your weekend off. I just wanted to say how thankful I am to have you in my classroom this year. I really feel like I developed not only a professional relationship, but then also a friendship.”

By the end of her student teaching, Caroline had already secured a teaching position in the same school district as her student teaching, in a 5th grade classroom, but in a different school.

Riley

Riley describes herself as very competitive and not afraid to use her voice. Her guiding theory is “do something do with your chest. Do it with confidence. If you fall, fall completely on your ass, don't just fall. Because, I mean, at the end of the day, someone's gonna have respect for you, that you kind of went full with your chest.” Riley loves to do research, especially when she doesn’t understand something, and shares her knowledge freely.

Riley attended Catholic schools through the 8th grade and then attended a public high school, both schools having very little diversity. Schools, and her peers in the schools, provided a level of security for Riley, as her family moved to different parts of the city frequently in her youth yet she was able to attend the same school no matter where she lived. She credits the teachers she had growing up as her inspiration for

becoming a teacher. Riley states that she wasn't exposed to diversity until she enrolled at the university, and is grateful for taking classes which exposed her to new ideas.

Riley completed her student teaching at in a large metropolitan district in Texas. There, she knew she would be exposed to a great deal of diversity, but was also drawn there because she received pay for her student teaching. Her CPM group was unique from the other groups in that three of the woman were roommates and student taught as the same school, and the other three woman were also roommates and taught at another school in the district. Riley had a difficult relationship with her CT, who did not offer guidance or feedback, and did not allow Riley to take control of the classroom. At the end of her student teaching, Riley had decided to accept a one-year position in Thailand teaching English. She plans to live with other teachers she met during her student teaching experience.

Sadie

Sadie describes herself as patient, compassionate, and very structured. She is soft-spoken with a calming personality, and she cares deeply for her students. This deep caring is also seen in Sadie's choice of career paths. Besides being an elementary education major, she was also a special education major. She feels very fortunate to know and understand a wide variety of students in a school. Describing her students, Sadie said "You love them too much to let them get away with the stuff that they're doing. I had to tell myself this a lot, because I'd have kids kicking and screaming at me, and I'm doing

this because I love them. I'm here because I love them, even though they're telling me they hate me right now, they hate the situation not me."

Sadie attended a small elementary school with a lot of multilingual students. She remembers being very jealous of the students who could speak multiple languages. She credits her job in a daycare for having the opportunity to work with children in foster care who have had traumatic experiences, and feels that this has been the source of empathy with all of the students she educates.

Sadie had a great relationship with both her general education CT, as well as her special education CT. After graduation, Sadie moved to Illinois to pursue teaching positions.

Elaine

Elaine describes herself as the "mom" of her CPM group. She came to teaching after having received a bachelor's degree in another field and worked in that profession for a few years, which afforded her many "real world" opportunities. She feels that she has a more realistic view of the world, but that her CPM

> was really important to me. They just kind of had almost a fresher approach to things, where I would get a little down and out about things. They were still so optimistic about a lot of things where I feel, like maybe I was like you know, at your age, I thought that too. But now, I don't think those kind of things, which is really funny because we really aren't that different in age.

Besides student teaching, Elaine worked full-time during the semester to support herself and her education.

Elaine believes her greatest strengths are adaptability and a "go-with-the-flow" mentality. She is not afraid to try something new in her classroom, and calls herself a "planner," although she realizes that things don't always go according to plan. She feels that she can relate to "difficult" students because she, herself, was a "difficult" student, having gone through her parents' divorce and a series of difficult times. These difficult times affected her academic performance and behavior in school, and states that she "could have been one of those statistics."

At the end of her student teaching, Elaine had accepted a fifth-grade position in a medium-sized school system in a different part of the state.

Claire

Claire describes herself as someone who takes initiative and is also very patient. She stated that her CPM group would probably describe her as "a little controlling. Because I was the one that was always trying to get everything done. I felt like nobody else wanted to get it done, so I just kind of had to, like, take the ropes and be, like okay, like I'm just going to do it because nobody else is doing it." She was a dual major student, with special education and elementary education. She feels that this has helped her to differentiate lessons for all students, and that she has the ability to explain content material in a variety of ways, which she really enjoys.

Claire grew up attending racially diverse, Title I schools in a large metropolitan area. Claire, herself, was on free and reduced lunch throughout her K-12 schooling and describes her family as 'low income'. Her family lived with her grandmother for quite a while when she was young in order to make ends meet. She was able to attend college on a full-ride scholarship because of her family's financial status and Claire took her coursework very seriously in order to keep her scholarship. She feels her own family and schooling history enables her to empathize with her students who might be going through similar situations.

At the end of her student teaching, Claire had accepted a third-grade position in the same school in Texas where she student taught.

Having introduced the CPM groups and several of the participants, I now discuss the findings, compose a network, amplify the network and exercise the network, in turn.

Compose a network

The participants in this study utilized their CPM groups to provide holistic support for each other. This finding describes how the CPM groups co-created their initial goals, created communication tools, leveraged university resources to help them meet those goals, and help some of their difficult discussions. The final portion of this section will discuss what occurred when the member of one CPM group did not feel that she was supported throughout the semester by her CPM group.

CPM Group as Holistic Support

Caroline (CPM G) stated in her interview, “Student teaching is hard, but it is huge learning experience, but it’s hard.” This was the statement, or one very similar to it, made by all of the student teachers. Besides supporting each other with professional aspects of teaching, like offering help with lesson planning, the CPM groups also supported each other emotionally. They reminded each other to get more sleep, go easy on themselves, give themselves grace when they make mistakes, and they helped each other manage time commitments outside of teaching. They also championed each other, discussed the importance of mental health, and formed deep friendships as each of the following paragraphs will detail.

Elaine (CPM A) provided much support for her group in this regard. Madelyn (CPM A) described in one of her reflections a time when Elaine supported her in one of their CPM meetings. The CPM group was discussing a video they had watched by Rita Pierson, *Every Child Needs a Champion*. “During our video [meeting], I was feeling really down and Elaine was a champion for me. Not only does every kid need a champion, but every teacher does as well. I might complain that my students’ MAP scores only went up two points, or not at all. But a champion for me would say at least none dropped. [This video] reminded us of this and it has paid off this week as we were struggling to get through the last week before Spring Break.”

Victoria and Emma’s CPM group (E) chose a video discussing the need for mental health care for the meeting discussion. Victoria stated that being new to the

profession, “we are thinking about being able to make a lesson plan, being able to go to meetings, being able to test kids, that we don’t even think about ourselves and how much that can affect our teaching. Our group probably talked, for like, over an hour about that.”

Additionally, to illustrate different types of holistic support, the friendships developed in their CPM groups extended past the requirements of the course. Caroline (CPM G) described her CPM group as her “right-hand ladies.” Elaine, Sadie, and Madelyn, along with the rest of their CPM (A) group, celebrated the end of their student teaching and Capstone presentations by going to the bars when the semester was complete. Sadie stated, “there was no one else I would have wanted to celebrate with that night. We have been through so much together that we wanted to celebrate together.”

CPM Group as Site for Co-construction of Goals

By the time the CPM groups met for the first time, the student teachers had already been in their schools for three weeks. This was because their university’s semester started later than normal due to COVID-19. During their first CPM meeting, Dr. Gray charged each group with establishing goals and aspirations for their group. However, each of the CPM groups co-constructed these goals differently with different processes. But, there were some commonalities. For example, most groups stated that one of their goals was to create a safe place to share both their struggles with student teaching, as well as their successes. In their first reflections, the student teachers made statements such as how that they wanted to “support each other when it comes to anything and everything,” (Elaine CPM A) “to be able to have a safe place to decompress

and share ideas with one another," (Claire CPM F) "engage in encouraging, positive conversations, share ideas and strategies, and support each other in our final months as undergraduate students." (Elizabeth CPM H)

Sadie characterized her CPM (A) group's goal as

> a support system within the college and to just be there for each other. We chose this goal because we are all feeling a bit overwhelmed both with life and with school. We also think it's really important to talk to people who are our age and can relate to our experiences a bit more because we are all collectively going through it together.

Elizabeth (CPM H) said that she had "felt disconnected during [the first three weeks] of student teaching by not having a space to talk with those in the same chapter as me."

Finally, Riley (CPM F) summarized best what many of the student teachers stated in her first reflection. She said,

> The first goal my group and I created was to create a safe space for us to share our ups and downs of student teaching. This goal is created with the purpose of stress relief and unconditional support for each other. We all agree that teaching can feel lonely, and we find ourselves questioning our progress compared to others. Am I teaching at the same level as my peers? Having this safe space to share our insecurities and roadblocks will help us feel supported in the classroom. I am

relieved to have others to fall back on when I am unsure of myself. Being in a new state, I find this goal especially exciting. Our second goal stems from the formation of this safe space. We find it important to share routines, activities, and management styles that work well for us. Sharing our successes is just as important as sharing our faults. It will allow us to gain useful tools that further our learning."

In summary, the CPM groups all identified at least one goal around using the group as a safe, judgment free space.

CPM Group as Resource for University Coursework

The student teachers utilized university communication platforms as part of their seminar course, including the use of Perusall. This connection to the university provided an additional source of information for the student teachers. During the school day, the student teachers relied on their CTs to give them advice and encouragement. The majority of the student teachers said that they received much support and felt valued by their CTs. This advice and encouragement, however, did not leave them without questions. The student teachers utilized the information provided to them by Dr. Gray for their Perusall assignments to help answer some of these additional questions by purposefully choosing articles or videos that were relevant for their situation. They, then, applied the discussions and annotations to their reflections to reinforce their thoughts and opinions. For example, several of the CPM groups chose the article *Approaching Discipline with Compassion*, because the student teachers wanted more options for

discipline in the classrooms. Their CPM group discussions centered on how they could implement the recommendations in their current and future classrooms.

Many of the CPM groups chose the video *Dear Teacher: Heartfelt Advice for Teachers from Students*. In this video, children tell teachers what they need in order to learn, and how the teachers' words affect their learning. For example, the children say "I need to move so that I can learn," "Whatever you do, please don't take away my recess," "It makes me really sad when you tell me to try harder when I have already tried my hardest." The discussions, and annotations on Perusall, centered around the student teachers reflecting on the language they use with their students every day. In particular, they helped each other problem-solve so that they can meet the needs of their students. Riley (CPM F) stated in her reflection,

> Our group had a great discussion about the importance of movement, relationships, and social/emotional wellness in the classroom. We found similarities in our cooperating teachers' strategies that reinforce positive behavior. However, this [one] strategy is usually to take away recess. Students either stay inside or sit on the bench. We all agreed that this method is not beneficial. Students need this time to move their bodies, especially because movement is restricted in the classroom due to COVID restrictions.

Lillian's CPM (D) group chose *Understanding Backwards Design* for one of their assignments. This CPM group's members were placed in private schools for their student teaching. These schools had different curriculum and resources than the student teachers

had had in their practicum experiences. As such, they chose this article to better help them with lesson planning. Lillian stated in her reflection,

> We discussed how important long-term goals are when teaching. Lesson objectives allow us to meet a short-term foal for the specific lesson, while long-term goals help us to see overall progress toward a broader learning goal. Since we are all placed in private schools for student teaching, we could all relate to how this approach can be implemented in the classroom. In the transition from public to private schools, we all had to adjust our teaching approach. Comparing the two settings allowed us to draw on the difference in teacher-based decisions for their classroom…. Due to this transition, the backward design provides a helpful guideline for us to follow in planning effective lessons.

The reflections and Perusall assignments, however, were not the source of professional growth for Claire (CPM F), but rather a source of stress and frustration. She felt that her group did not prioritize the assignments and would consistently turn them in as the last minute. She stated that she never had time to interact with their annotations because they weren't done in a timely manner. "So, I'm the person that, I always have my assignments turned in like a couple days before just because I just don't like knowing that I have stuff do." This also affected the time frame in which she wanted to complete her reflections. "I will say, though, it was nice to, like, be able to talk with people about everything, but it was more of I would rather just talk with them about it and not actually have to do assignments with them. It was kind of terrible, to be honest." She was

especially frustrated with her CPM group with the final Capstone project, to the point where she emailed Dr. Gray to express her dissatisfaction with her group and that she felt they were not completing their portions.

CPM Group as an Opportunity to Hold Difficult Discussions

Besides the different levels of support previously stated, the CPM communities provided space for difficult conversations, making the need for a "safe space" even more valuable. The CPM groups discussed topics such as race and politics, and how these present themselves in the classroom. For most of the student teachers, these are topics in which they do not have much experience discussing, and they described their surprise with their presence in elementary classrooms.

Sophia (CPM F) student taught in Texas, and had many difficult discussions with her CPM group about race.

> As the teacher and the only white person [in the classroom], addressing topics of race and diversity, how do you tackle those in the classroom with younger students? And that is another thing we talked a lot about, is like having those hard conversations with students that are young, because I mean, **t**hey need to hear it just as much as a fifth grader, and so talking to a first grader and talking to a fifth grader, you're gonna have a different conversation like you'll handle it differently, but it's still an important conversation that needs to be had.

Sophia described how her CPM group brainstormed ideas, pulling ideas from previous coursework, articles, and videos. Sophia also relied on her CT, who was Black, for advice, stating that she asked her "If you were me in this situation, what would you do?"

Elizabeth (CPM H) and Olivia (CPM C) described how there was no racial diversity in their student teaching classrooms, which also led to some difficult discussions. They discussed students repeating at school what they had heard at home regarding the presidential election. This became especially problematic when they were reading books about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Olivia stated

> So, I was walking on eggshells. For me, I need to put diversity into this classroom and I'm not sure how, and so I read a book about Martin Luther King, Jr. [The book discusses segregation.] And I remember like kids were crying because some of them obviously had never heard of anything like this before, they just didn't know. I had a kid crying because their best friend is black and they were, like, I wouldn't be able to play with my best friend.

Elizabeth (CPM H) and Olivia (CPM C) both described how their CPM groups discussed how important these discussions were to their group, and how they felt supported to better discuss them with their students once they had processed with their CPM group. However, neither student teacher discussed how they used this as a teachable moment, or grew from the experience.

Group E used their Perusall assignment to hold a discussion about culturally sustaining pedagogy through their annotations of the article, *It's important to know who they are: Teachers' efforts to sustain students' cultural competence in an age of high-stakes testing* (Zoch, 2017). Their annotations celebrated the diversity in their classroom, and how they enjoyed encouraging social justice discussions with their students, as they wanted their students to realize the value of their cultures. They confirmed the importance of understanding your students' backgrounds and cultures. A poignant observation was made that this pedagogy is especially important in the time of COVID, as COVID is affecting people of Color at a higher rate. They also noted that their students of Color were attending class virtually at a higher rate than their White students, which concerned them for the student's long-term education.

However, besides the previously mentioned discussions, the majority of the groups did not use their CPM groups as an opportunity for discussions about race. In fact, the topic of race was absent from the majority of the groups. The groups chose articles and videos for the Perusall assignments about behavior management or approaching discipline with compassion over the articles or videos directly discussing race or multilingualism. In the rare occurrences when they did choose one of these articles or videos, their discussion stayed away from naming racism, race, or how any of the behaviors that they were describing as "problematic" could be related to race or racial bias.

In addition to avoidance, several of the student teachers used the term Title I to refer to topics of race that they did not want to name. This euphonism for race was used to explain behaviors that the student teachers wanted to address. For example, Victoria (CPM E) stated,

> You can't have students being able to learn if they don't have positive behaviors. So, we had a lot of [bad] behaviors we had to work with because we are a Title I school, and so we are more of the low income, a lot of immigrants, a lot of English Language Learners.

Sadie (CPM A) also used this euphonism when she stated,

> A majority of my experiences are in Title I schools, and when you're in Title I, I wouldn't call it a luxury, but you don't really have the time to not have that structure in place, because they don't have it at home like they do with some other, [pause] it's just the demographics of children and families are different. And so, I really work hard to implement my routines and expectations first.

Shortcomings of CPM Groups

While all of the student teachers described instances in which they received support from their CPM groups, there were also instances in which they did not. Claire (CPM F) and Lillian (CPM D) were both elementary education and special education dual majors. As such, both had shortened times (nine weeks) in each of their student teaching classrooms, making a transition from their one classroom to another halfway

through the semester. This transition can be difficult, which was stated by both Claire and Lillian. Lillian stated, “I would have appreciated a little bit more support in people being able to relate with the pacing of my student teaching in comparison to theirs, because they were fading out of their student teaching by the time I was starting this [special education] experience.”

Claire (CPM F) also described this difficult transition, however, since she did not receive the support she would have liked from her CPM group, she sought advice from friends from her special education courses.

> We had a separate SPED class that we met, like every other Monday, and so we’d have time to talk and digest how we’re feeling. I don’t know if it’s just because I knew them all, like I’ve known them for four years because we’re been in the same program, so I felt a lot more comfortable, but like in the CPM group, I guess I didn’t really know them too well so I didn’t feel comfortable enough to ask for their help.

In summary, while most of the student teachers felt that they received additional support from the CPM group, this was not the case with everyone, as Lillian and Claire illustrate.

In this first finding, compose a network, I have discussed how the CPM groups created their communities to support their own unique needs. This included the establishing of their initial goals, the use of additional communication tools, the

leveraging university resources, providing each other with holistic supports and holding difficult discussions. I also discussed when student teachers did not feel supported by their CPM group. Next, I discuss the second finding, amplify the network.

CPM Group as Communication Hub

In addition to setting goals and aspirations, all of the CPM groups created additional ways of supporting each other outside of their course requirements and their CPM group meetings. All of the groups created a group text, initially for keeping in contact about meeting times and class assignments. For several, however, these also turned into opportunities to get advice from each other during the school day. Victoria (CPM E) and Caroline (CPM G) both stated how reassuring it was to know that their CPM group was just a text away, especially when they were having a difficult day.

Elaine, Sadie, and Madelyn's CPM group (A) had a group text they used for professional matters. But, they also created a SnapChat group, for the sole purpose of reaching out to each other socially, as well as to share fun stories and successes in their lives outside of teaching.

The group text for Sadie (CPM A) provided an additional opportunity to shine, by sharing her special education knowledge with her CPM group. Her group turned to her as the expert to answer questions about special education such as completing paperwork, attending meetings, and addressing behavior problems. They utilized the group text to ask Sadie questions during the day. Sadie said, "I was super happy because they'd be texting me questions like, how do I do this, or how do I do that, and it made me so happy they

wanted to learn more about it." Sadie stated that she loved sharing her special education knowledge and resources, and that she was the official "resource spokesperson for our group."

Amplify the network

Throughout the semester, the student teachers utilized their access to each other and each other's CTs as an additional resource from which to learn. This finding will detail how the student teachers utilized this network to expand their personal teaching strategies; address behavior management, content, and non-lesson questions; and provide support when CT support was unavailable.

CPM Group as Access Point to All Cooperating Teachers

Each group created sharing opportunities that enabled them to learn from each other's CTs. Caroline (CPM G) said, "I feel like I really got to know everyone's CTs [in her CPM group], even though I never met them. I know everyone's first names [the CTs] in our group, I know their teaching strategies, and some of their callbacks that they use, just based off what my group members said."

Caroline also described this network by saying

> The fact that we all fell in love with our CTs, we were constantly sharing their advice in our meeting. So, if we had an idea or a topic or a question that we kind of left that meeting being like, we need to know more, we need some more insight or whatever, we would all go off and talk to our CTs and come back and share

> what they thought. Because, I mean, there there's nothing more beneficial than having six master teachers give their input on a certain idea, and then you can just take all that information in and then figure out what you would do yourself**.**

During many of the CPM group meetings, the student teachers would ask what other CTs would do regarding a lesson, a behavior management problem, etc. The student teachers would describe what they have seen their CTs do, giving multiple perspectives to the same question. When the student teachers did not have a response, they often said, "I don't know. I'll ask my CT and text you what she says." The student teachers then shared the responses, usually in their group text, but several times revisited the topic during their next meeting.

Elaine (CPM A) also discussed learning from her CPM group's CTs. While reiterating the strong friendships that developed in her CPM group, she also stated that she

> got insight into all these other classrooms, and these other teachers who I personally didn't get to meet, but I feel like I know them. It was a great way to bounce off not only personal things that are going on, but professional things, and I really felt like I learned through everyone else's experiences.

Elaine ended up meeting with one of the other CTs at the end of the semester, who was able to provide her with additional resources for her new classroom.

CPM Group as Planning and Instruction Advisor

The network was also worked for lesson planning and explaining how their CTs taught particular skills. Science and math concepts were topics of frequent discussion. Many of the student teachers described feeling nervous teaching these subjects in their meetings. They often shared lesson plans with each other prior to teaching the lesson in order to get feedback from their peers.

Natalie (CPM B) described how she sought ideas from her CPM group on how to make science more exciting and engaging for her Kindergarten students. In her previous practicum experiences, science was not taught on a regularly, so she that she needed new ideas. “I wanted to make science more fun, and so I feel like I’ve asked them [CPM group] for a lot of advice on what are some things that I could do to make the lesson more engaging and, kind of, get them more involved, rather than, oh, it’s science again and this is going to be so boring.”

Elaine (CPM A) described her struggle with small group reading, detailing how difficult it was for her to plan for her on-level students and her below-level students. “I would always ask what are you doing in your small group reading? This is what I have planned out for on-level, my above-level, and my below level. What’s working for you, because these are the challenges I’m facing.” In addition to their CPM meetings, this was also a frequent topic in their group chat. “We really felt like time is so important that we really wanted to be able to put our best foot forward. We were constantly texting each

other about small group reading." Elaine's CPM provided each other with feedback on how they and their CTs were teaching small group reading in their classrooms.

CPM Group as Advisor on Behavior Management

The information that the student teachers shared about their CTs was varied. A common theme among all of the groups was behavior management. Often, during their "highs and lows" sharing time during their CPM meetings, a student teacher would describe a "low" as one of her student's behavior that she was finding difficult to address. The CPM group members then described what they had seen their CTs do in a similar situation.

Sadie sought advice from her CPM (A) group regarding behavior management after she transitioned from her special education student teaching into her general education student teaching. She described the difficulty that the students had with her in her new position in the classroom, as they had previously seen her in the classroom in her special education role. "It was really hard to implement my routines and expectations." Sadie described how her group spent a lot of time helping her process this transition, and gave her many ideas to try with her kindergarteners to address the behavior management problems she was having.

Caroline described a situation that she had with one of her first-grade students. This student had difficulty controlling his emotions but had more good days than bad days in her classroom. Then, the student starting missing multiple days of school. When he returned, he struggled to engage in class, and was very sad. Caroline's group helped

her process how she could best help this student. Caroline implemented what she called a "five-minute triage" at the beginning of the day with this student, checking in with him, asking him how he was feeling, getting him a breakfast if he hadn't yet eaten, and telling him how happy she was that he was there that day. On some days, she did a similar triage after lunch. Caroline described how this intervention really helped the student to engage, manage his emotions, and "set him up for success." She also described how excited she was to report back to her group how successful this intervention was.

Additionally, the student teachers discussed non-lesson related topics such as brain breaks and callbacks. These topics are usually chosen because they are the teacher's personal preference. Elizabeth (CPM H) described her dislike of the callbacks that her CT uses but stated that she was not creative enough to create new ones. Elizabeth's CPM group provided her with the callbacks that each of the CTs use and Elizabeth learned several callbacks that she then used in her classroom.

Elizabeth also described her need for additional ideas for brain breaks. She had realized that her students needed a break during their hour-long science lessons. One of her CPM group members described the "melting snowman" brain break that her CT uses. The students stand up like a snowman. They then pretend to "melt" onto the floor. Once all of the students have melted, they then rebuild themselves. According to Elizabeth, the whole process takes about a minute and then the students were ready to focus on science again. She also stated that this worked very well for her students.

CPM Group as Site to Receive Additional Support

The previously described access was important to the student teachers who stated that they had a "good" or "great" relationship with their CTs. They stated that they were able to learn from each other's CTs. This access, however, was especially important to Riley (CPM F), who had a difficult relationship with her CT. Riley (CPM F)'s CT did not provide her with constructive criticism or constructive feedback. Neither did she compliment Riley when she was doing well. Riley described many days in which she cried in the bathroom during the school day and in the evening when she got home. Riley learned about Sophia (CPM F)'s CT through their CPM meeting, but also because she was her roommate.

This finding has illustrated how the student teachers utilized their access to each other and each other's CTs as an additional resource from which to learn. This included how the student teachers utilized this network to expand their personal teaching strategies; answer address behavior management, content, and non-lesson questions; and provide support when CT support was unavailable. The final finding will discuss how the student teachers exercised their networks

Exercise the network

The final finding to be discussed is exercise the network. Because participating in a CPM group was part of the course associated with their student teaching, the student teachers experienced collaboration in various forms throughout the semester. They described collaborating with each other as something normal, expected, and valued.

While the student teachers understood that they would all be in different schools, and with different colleagues, many indicated that they envision continuing to utilize their current CPM group chats with questions and concerns, and hope to maintain their friendships and collaborations in the future. As for utilizing collaboration with their future colleagues, the student teachers indicated that they did not see this as an *if* question, but a *how* question. Lillian (CPM D) summarized what many of the student teachers said,

> I think just like in any aspect of life, any profession, collaboration is really important. But I think in the education setting, it's vital. I think you have to be able to talk to one another and gain other perspectives and just grow from the wisdom of other people around you and the experience of other people. And so, I think that collaboration and leaning on one another is really important, because you understand each other on a different level, because they also are teachers.

CPM Groups as Advisor for Selecting Collaborators

The student teachers described the type of colleagues they envisioned as their future collaborators, with the most important element being that there should be a purposeful selection. In order to build a community where everyone is comfortable to share and seek advice, all of the members have to be "on board." They described the need to set guidelines, be honest and respect each other's opinions. Throughout the semester, the student teachers reflected on how important the connections and the "safe place" to talk about anything build a foundation on support and trust. Lillian (CPM D) described

how the “collaborative experiences have allowed us [her CPM group] to learn and grow.” And, this collaboration is what they hoped to find in the future.

In addition to this, the student teachers described various forms for their future collaborations. Some discussed the need to have members in the same grade level, or on their same school grade team. Others described the need to collaborate with various members of their school, for example, the school psychologist and special education teachers. Still others described collaborating with teachers in the same grade as them, but in different schools in their district. Caroline (CPM G) described how she would like a collaboration with a male colleague, “I only had women in my group, I would have loved to have heard from like a K [Kindergarten] through two [grade 2] male individual speak on what it's like building relationships with their students.”

The student teachers also stated that aspects of collaboration were important to them during their job search. Many stated that they asked questions in their interviews regarding supports that they would get in their first year of teaching. Natalie (CPM B) stated,

> In the beginning of this semester, our CPM group focused on receiving feedback but also supporting each other through the highs and lows of student teaching. I believe this is something I was looking for in my job search. I had a goal of finding a school that I could rely on for feedback but also feel as if I was supported through the unknown of my first year of teaching.

Lillian (CPM D) described how her new school utilizes a coaching program for new teachers, and this is one of the reasons she accepted the position. Others described how they envisioned their grade level teams working as a collaborative group. Caroline (CPM G) described how the first-grade team where she student taught was very collaborative and how she would "a really collective helpful environment if that's not already set in stone at the school I go to."

CPM Group as Site for Professional Development

Throughout the semester, the CPM groups utilized their time together for support and guidance. However, they also used their collaboration to challenge each other to become better professionals, to ask meaningful questions that forced them think deeper. Many of the student teachers described similar situations to Lillian (CPM D) who stated,

> I like to challenge them to think deeper. But I think from a different perspective, and that's kind of my approach to life in general, is I always am trying to reflect on experiences, and I challenge my own thinking and I challenge other people's thinking to consider other people and how they might be thinking with regards to a situation or just how you could think of it in a different way.

Constantly improving and becoming better teachers was common throughout the reflections during the semester. Natalie (CPM B) summarized what most of the student teachers felt about the value of collaboration, "because I know I'm 21 years old, I know I'm not this big, fabulous teacher and I know that I can learn so much from others, and that's something I really value."

CPM Group as Illustration of Positioning

I utilized positioning theory as a lens through which to gain further insight into the CPM groups. Throughout the semester, there were various ways in which the student teachers were positioned or positioned themselves (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). At times, this positioning mattered, and other times when it did not seem to have an effect. The following sections illustrate how positioning was manifested with the student teachers, their classroom placements and their CPM groups.

Positioned by CTs as future colleagues

By far, the majority of the student teachers had a positive relationship with their CTs. The student teachers described positive feedback and that they learned a tremendous amount from their CTs. For example, many of the student teachers described how their CTs provided constructive feedback on her lessons after they had presented them. The CTs described what had gone well, and also included areas for improvement. And, the CTs respected the student teachers' knowledge by adopting some of the student teachers' practices into their own. The student teachers also described initially being nervous to ask questions because they didn't want to look inadequate in front of their CTs. In this regard, the CTs created an environment where the student teachers felt comfortable asking questions. Additionally, the CTs created space for the student teachers to have a voice in their team and faculty meetings. This supportive learning environment aligns with the traits of a successful mentor described by Feiman-Nemser (2001), Trevethan & Sandretto (2017), Heineke & Giatsou (2020), Vass (2017) and Callahan (2016). In this

regard, the student teachers were positioned as potential future colleagues. The student teachers were treated as professionals, given constructive feedback, and made to feel part of the school community.

And yet, at the same time, the self-positioning as knowledgeable equals in the CPM groups added an additional layer of support as Le Cornu (2005) and Behizadeh et al. (2019) discuss in their studies. This additional layer of support enhanced the student teachers' learning by amplifying their network, as well as provided additional emotional support. In other words, the student teachers seemed to benefit from both positionings.

This positioning relationship is illustrated by Elaine (CPM A), who described her CT as wonderful, and that she learned a tremendous amount from her. But, at the same time, she described the strong friendships that she developed within her group, and the additional resources she had learning from the members of her CPM group. Caroline (CPM G) also illustrates this type of dual positioning. Caroline not only described the tremendous learning opportunity with her CT, but she also described her CPM group as her "right-hand ladies," a group who supported her, and learned with her throughout the semester.

Positioned as incapable by CT

While the traditional mentor/mentee positioning seemed to have a beneficial effect on the student teachers who had a positive relationship with their mentors, it did seem to have an effect on Riley (CPM F), who had a negative relationship with her

mentor. She was positioned by her CT as incapable and not worthy of her time or feedback. This positioning caused Riley much stress and made learning and developing her teacher identity quite difficult. However, when positioned as knowledgeable equals with her CPM group, Riley gained confidence to continue to try and better her relationship with her CT. Riley's CPM group provided her the space to deal with, unpack, and push back on her positioning. Ultimately, when her CT was absent for the last two weeks of her student teaching experience, Riley was able to conduct lessons, manage the classroom in a way that was in line with her beliefs, and grow her teacher identity in her classroom. The weight of the inadequate positioning was lifted, and Riley described the last two weeks as an incredible learning opportunity.

Positioning as professional vs. student

In addition to mentor/mentee and knowledgeable peers positioning, the majority of the student teachers positioned themselves as professionals. With this positioning, the student teachers utilized their CPM meetings, and course assignments associated with their CPM groups, as a form of professional development. They learned from each other, challenged each other, and took advantage of the university resources, all in an effort to better their teaching. They composed an additional network to amplify their learning. These actions were all very agentive, positively influencing their teacher identity development.

This type of positioning as professional is illustrated by the CPM groups providing holistic support for each other by talking about mental health issues. It is also

seen in the learning opportunities from each other with regard to lessons, teaching strategies, and learning from each other's CTs.

However, this self-positioning as a professional in the CPM groups does not describe Claire (CPM F). Claire was frustrated the entire semester with her CPM group, especially with the three members who were placed in the other school in Texas. Her focus was on the completion of the assignments, and she did not see the assignments as a form of professional development. She complained that she was always the first to the Perusall assignments, and didn't have time to interact with the annotations because the other members always posted late, often after the due date. She became especially frustrated during the preparation of the Capstone presentation and emailed Dr. Gray that her group was not completing the project, stating that she turned in her portion without them. Claire's frustration seems to be a result of the CPM groups being a part of the student teaching seminar, a course which requires a grade for graduation. In her interview, she described how grades were very important to her and that she wanted to maintain a high GPA. In this, she had positioned herself as a student, and cared about the work as student.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings of this study to answer the research question, what are the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor groups? As seen in the data, the CPM groups offered holistic support when members were struggling, and held difficult conversations when needed. The student

teachers experienced their CPM group as a venue for composing a network of critical peers and co-constructing their own goals. Without prompting, they utilized additional communication tools and leveraged university resources to meet their group's needs. Additionally, they also realized the shortcomings of the group when founded.

Second, the student teachers utilized their CPM groups for amplifying their access to veteran cooperating teachers. In doing so, they learned and shared personal teaching strategies, addressed content instruction concerns, and addressed behavior management problems. They also served as an additional layer of support for all members, but especially for a student teacher that did not have a good relationship with her CT.

Third, the student teachers exercised the tools necessary to embed collaboration into their teaching lives. They described how they selected collaborators, and engaged in professional development. And finally, I have provided additional insight into the CPM groups by discussing how positioning was manifested in this study. In Chapter 5, I discuss how these findings connect the literature in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction to the discussion

As part of their student teaching experience, the group of student teachers in this study utilized Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups to support and learn from each other. This chapter places their CPM experiences in dialogue with the current literature to answer the research question, what are the lived experiences of student teachers who participate in Critical Peer Mentor groups? In this chapter, I detail how these findings support, contradict, and offer unique new knowledge in relation to the existing literature.

CPM groups and the mentoring literature

As one contextual component of their student teaching experience, the participants in this study were placed in classrooms with a cooperating teacher serving as a mentor. This aligns with the literature which states that traditional education programs often rely on the expertise of cooperating teachers, or "educative mentors" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 17). The literature describes the skills and traits necessary for a strong mentor. These skills and traits for mentor teachers include having productive conversations with the student teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and viewing themselves as learners (Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). They also include focusing on new teachers fluctuating beliefs and limited experience, as well as providing feedback on lesson planning, lesson delivery and classroom management (Callahan, 2016). Additionally, these skills and traits include the modeling of effective teaching practices in order to add

these practices to their own teaching repertoire (Matsko et al., 2020). And, in the role of a coach, the mentor gives instruction support, frequent feedback and encouragement, and an increase of autonomy in the classroom. (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Clarke et al., 2014; Matsko et al., 2020; Canipe & Gunckel, 2020).

In alignment with the literature, the student teachers in this study, with the exception of one, stated that they learned all of this and more from their CTs. They described how their CTs gave them feedback on lessons, provided insight into behavior management, and taught them about the workings of the school. For example, Caroline stated that in addition to learning about lessons and classroom management, her CT "was seriously just the best. She would text me randomly on the weekends and, just be like, I hope you're enjoying your weekend off. I just wanted to say how thankful I am to have you in my classroom this year. I really feel like I developed not only a professional relationship, but then also a friendship."

Additionally, the literature states that field-based experiences provide the learning where college university cannot go, and these experiences can further what they learn in their courses (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2016; Heineke & Giatsou, 2020). This study is also in alignment with this literature as the student teachers in this study were in field placements which provided them the opportunity to work with students daily to develop not only their lesson presentation, but also participate in hands-on classroom and behavior management. This is evidence in Caroline's discussion of her student who was struggling to control his emotions, and Sadie's discussion of behavior

management when she transitioned from her special education placement to her general education placement. Without this field-placement, these student teachers would not have been able to learn these skills.

However, there is also a negative aspect to mentoring. This negative aspect is a power hierarchy in the classroom which can create difficult circumstances for the student teacher's learning, and can serve as a gatekeeper from the profession (Clarke et al., 2014). This power hierarchy can also create a negative atmosphere for the student teacher's learning when the mentor teacher is not familiar with the current teacher education practices. This can limit the student teacher's implementation of innovative practices and create tension when the student teacher wants to do something differently than the mentor teacher (Vass, 2017b).

In this study, Riley is an example of the negative aspect of mentoring. Riley's cooperating teacher created difficult circumstances for Riley's learning. She did not give Riley freedom to be creative with her lessons, nor did she allow Riley to present lessons in a way that Riley felt was best for her students' learning. Riley's CT did not possess the traits of a strong mentor, as she did not provide feedback on lesson planning, lesson delivery and classroom management. She also did not model strong teaching practices from which Riley could learn.

CPM Groups and critical mentoring

In recent years, the field of mentoring has expanded beyond the traditional mentoring model of a more experienced, often older, mentor instilling knowledge to a less experienced, often younger, mentee. As leader in the youth mentoring field, Weiston-Serdan (2017)'s book Critical Mentoring provides an alternative to the traditional model. In her book, the author details the importance of empowering youth in a mentor/mentee relationship. Weiston-Serdan (2017) states that "critical mentoring requires a type of youth centrism that means young people have voice, power, and choice" (p. 19). Youth are capable and should be given the opportunity to lead and mentoring is reciprocal, collaborative partnerships which should understand the context.

The traits that the author lists are important traits for teachers to possess, too, as reciprocal and collaborative relationships provide opportunities for growth. While her work focuses on black youth, and the need for black mentors, I wondered what could happen if crucial elements are not available to make critical mentoring possible. I wondered how the critical aspect could work with majority white student teachers. Empowered to use their voice and agency, could these student teachers provide critical mentoring for each other, their peers? While I cannot say definitively that the student teachers brought critical elements to every discussion that they should have, there is evidence that critical supports occurred. For example, the CPM groups had discussions regarding race, whether it was Sophia being the only white person in the classroom or Elizabeth and Olivia discussing how their all-white students needed to learn more about race than Martin Luther King, Jr. Elizabeth and Olivia also had discussions with their

respective CPM groups regarding the repeating of divisive home comments about political figures and mantras, especially after President Biden defeated former President Trump.

CPM groups and the peer mentoring literature

As a second contextual component of their student teaching experience, the student teachers in this study were placed into Critical *Peer* Mentor groups. As peers, they had all completed the same teacher education program and were in their student teaching experience. Le Cornu (2005) states that a common component in all peer mentoring is that the parties involved in the peer mentoring are positioned as co-learners or co-constructors of knowledge. Additionally, in her review of the history of peer mentoring, the author states that there are three components of peer mentoring, all of which are in alignment with the findings of this study.

First, Le Cornu (2005) states that there is a mentoring attitude, one which values one's own learning while at the same time valuing the learning of others. But, the author states that since many consider education an individualistic profession, this can be difficult for pre-service teachers to feel responsibility for their peers' learning. This study does not align with this statement, as the student teachers did exhibit a mentoring attitude. They were concerned with each other's learning, and they valued each other's support and knowledge. This can be seen in this study by the effort that the student teachers helped and worked with each other to address teaching strategies, content instruction and behavior management. For example, Sadie freely shared her knowledge of special

education with her peers in her CPM group. Natalie sought advice for making her science lessons more fun, and Elaine sought advice for help with her guided reading lessons.

The second component of peer mentoring in teacher education is the development of interpersonal skills so that teachers are able to work with adults as well as children (Le Cornu, 2005). This includes an element of trust as well as the ability to deal with conflicts. This study is an example of how this can occur. The student teachers in this study not only gained experience with working with children, they also learned to develop professional relationships with their group members. Natalie stated that her CPM group "focused on supporting each other through the highs and lows of student teaching." All of the CPM groups set guidelines for their interactions, were honest with each other, and respected each other's opinions. Lillian stated that the "collaborative experiences have allowed us [her CPM group] to learn and grow."

The final component for peer mentoring is the development of critical reflection skills. For this component, the pre-service teachers should learn to reflect on, and question, their beliefs as well as the assumptions of others, in an effort to uncover values and interests served (or not) by education. This component is underpinned by a strong commitment to social justice (Le Cornu, 2005). Throughout the semester, the student teachers were guided to reflect on their experiences as a component of their student teaching seminar. Additionally, the student teachers used their time together in their CPM groups to discuss elements of the Perusall articles that they felt needed to be addressed. For example, many of the groups discussed *Dear Teacher: Heartfelt Advice for Teachers*

from Students, a video in which children give teachers advice on how to best help them learn. For example, the student teachers discussed how one piece of advice from the children is "whatever you do, please don't take away my recess." And yet, the student teachers said that they saw this frequently in their schools as a punishment.

CPM groups and race evasion literature

Jupp (2020) defines colorblind racism or race-evasion refers as the continued denials by White people that race is a crucial social phenomenon. This denial can range from denying that a person "sees" race to the utilization of race-evasive discursive strategies. These discursive strategies can include, among others, outright denial of race, defensive silences, the conflation of race for class. By definition, the student teachers in this study engaged in race evasion throughout the semester. The majority simply did not talk about race, even in situations where it should have been expected. There were exceptions to this, but they were few. And, this occurred in all schools, including schools that are highly diverse. They also did not make connections between their larger struggles of behavior management and effective lesson planning. Additionally, the student teachers used the euphonism of Title I to refer to conflate race and class, thus avoiding the naming of race altogether.

In addition to the student teachers' race evasion, I also participated in race evasion during my data analysis. I was so focused on what the student teachers were telling me about their experiences that I did not effectively notice what was missing from the data.

However, after this was pointed out to me by a committee member, I re-analyzed the data in order to account for this absence.

Agency

In the framework on teacher identity formation, (Beijaard et al., 2004) define as "a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching" (p. 123). An important component of this teacher identity formation is agency, which the authors describe by stating that "teachers have to be active in the process of professional development" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122).

This study supports the literature on teacher identity development and agency. By the end of the semester, the student teachers' teaching identities were strengthened as each reported increased confidence and felt more agentive, and many linked this increase in feeling agentive to their CPM groups. They also used their collective agency to create more opportunities for learning. Each CPM amplified their resources by not only helping each other and seeing each other as knowledgeable peers, but they also agentively used the knowledge of their CTs to learn and grow even more. Finally, the student teachers illustrated the growth in their teacher identity development by agentively deciding how they are best supported in their profession. The student teachers indicated that they intended to continue to seek out peer mentorship in the future, and tied this expectation to their generally positive experience in the CPM groups.

Unexpected use of agency in CPM groups

An unexpected finding from this study, and one which proved to be especially powerful for the student teachers, was the amplification of their networks with regard to their CTs. In the traditional scenarios, a student teacher has one CT from which to learn. This is what Lave & Wenger (1991) describe as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. As student teaching is a form of apprenticeship, the authors conceptualize individual "newcomers" engaging with individual "old-timers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 12). In this regard, this study does contain legitimate peripheral participation. But, there is also more.

The findings of this study expand on Lave & Wenger's conceptualization. As individuals, the student teachers, "newcomers", were placed with an individual CT, "old-timer". In this study, however, the student teachers went beyond their traditional one-to-one relationship. They created access to each other as a support network, *and* created a network of experienced teachers. In other words, with the CPM groups, the student teachers amplified their network by gaining access to multiple old-timers. There were multiple student teachers learning from multiple CTs. They used their agency to increase their learning exponentially by learning from each other, as well as each other's CTs. They openly shared what their CTs did in their classroom, whether it was regarding curriculum, behavior management, or whatever the question their peers had. And, when they didn't have an answer, they offered to ask their CTs the question and then let their peer know the answer. This form of networking simply does not exist in the traditional setting.

In the following sections, I turn to the implications of the findings, and their connection to the literature. I also make recommendations for future research, and further discuss this study by stating its strengths and weaknesses.

Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, this study found that CPM groups provided an additional framework of support for student teachers. While continuing to utilize the experiences and knowledge of practicing teachers, the traditional model of student teaching, the CPM groups provide an additional layer of support from their peers. This seems to add a counterbalance to the traditional power hierarchy, by empowering the student teachers to make their student teaching experience their own. The agency utilized by the student teachers, which was nurtured and supported by their CPM groups, is a positive component in the development of their teacher identity. This agency also provided an additional outlet for learning by amplifying their network, both from their peers and the network of cooperating teachers. All of this suggests that CPM groups can be a powerful tool in developing early career teachers.

Most students in a teacher education program must complete a student teaching experience, however, that is not always the case. What is certain, nonetheless, is that all teachers are new teachers in the early stages of their careers. Therefore, this study can serve as a model for adding an additional layer of support. By embedding the CPM groups into the student teaching seminar, the student teachers have a connection to the university and to each other. This can provide a space to encourage and utilize their

course teachings, which may be distinctly different than their mentor teachers. Potentially, CPM groups could be embedded into earlier courses in the teacher education program, so that their first introduction to this type of support is not in their final semester.

As the student teachers in this study indicated with their desire to continue with some form of additional support after graduation, CPM groups could provide first year teachers with an additional layer of support during their first years in the classroom. In some districts, new teachers are provided with an experienced teacher as a mentor, which is a continuation of the power hierarchy of their student teaching. CPM groups could serve as a counterbalance to the power differential, as well as a provide the holistic supports that most first-year teachers need and want. These CPM groups could be formed by the teachers, or interested new teachers could submit their names to someone through the university and groups could be formed similar to the process that Dr. Gray and I used to for the CPM groups for this study.

CPM groups may also aide in the retention of early career teachers. By providing the early career teachers with additional supports, they may have a more realistic view of the teaching profession which can be cause for emotional burnout, and an early exit from the profession (Hong, 2010; Clarke et al., 2014). This may be an especially timely implication as the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be accelerating the exit from the field all teachers, not just early career teachers (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021).

However, if CPM groups are going to push student teachers to have the necessary discussions regarding race, thus enacting the critical aspect, there needs to be a way to confirm that these discussions actually occur. As evidenced in this study, the student teachers engaged in race evasion throughout the semester. This could be by accomplished by introducing CPM groups earlier in the teacher education program so that they have time to develop the necessary skills and including more discussions of race throughout the program. But, there needs to be a fine line between having these discussions and still ensuring the agency of the student teachers in their groups.

Recommendations for future research

As a phenomenological study, this data described the initial lived experiences of one subset of elementary student teachers, those participating in CPM groups. Therefore, additional studies should investigate the use of CPM groups on not only more elementary student teachers, but also secondary. The participants should include male participants, as this study only had female participants. Due to the timing of this study, and not wanting to add further stress for the student teachers, I only requested one interview. Further studies should also explore the potential for additional interviews with the participants. And, because of the timing, I was only able to form one focus group. Additional focus groups could also be beneficial to the understanding of the CPM groups.

Because this study took place during a pandemic, further studies should investigate how CPM groups function during more “normal” times. Additionally, since the CPM groups met online only, further studies should investigate the effectiveness of

groups that meet face-to-face, or a hybrid of online and face-to-face. It would also be beneficial to observe the group in real time and not through recordings, as this would have the potential for the researcher to ask for clarifications. Future research might also try to ensure that all of the CPM group members are participants in the study to get a better feel of the group dynamic, and not solely the opinion of several members. And, when COVID-19 protocols are no longer a factor, classroom observations might provide additional insight into the mentor/mentee relationship and the relationship between the student teacher and students.

Through the student teaching seminar, the student teachers in this study were provided access to multiple resources with various critical aspects and elements. In this study, the student teachers chose them for their Perusall assignments and subsequent discussions. Further research should investigate additional critical resources and the student teachers' access to them. Different resources and access may cause an increase the critical thinking of the student teachers and the CPM groups. Future studies should also explore the possibility of how these resources are taken up in more racially and linguistically diverse classrooms than the ones in this study.

Strengths of this study

This study focused on the lived experiences of student teachers utilizing CPM groups during their student teaching experience. In their original call, Connelley & Clandinin stated the importance of listening to the voices of teachers and preservice teachers to "understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations,

of children, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1). This understanding, or the need to listen to teachers and preservice teachers, has been foundational in how the education profession has come to understand teacher identity development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). By forefronting the voices of the student teachers, their lived experiences have been prominent throughout this study. In an experience such as this, it is crucial to honor the voices of those who participated. This study has done that.

This study was designed and intended to be an additional support for student teachers. It was not designed to be a replacement for any of the current, traditional induction methods, as there is value in the student teachers, newcomers, learning from experienced teachers, old-timers (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Callahan, 2016; Clarke et al., 2014; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). Not only did the student teachers in this study learn from their cooperating teachers, they amplified their network of old-timers, learning from each other's cooperating teachers. They also used their agency to learn from each other and use resources that best served their unique purposes. The student teachers supported each other not only with professional elements of student teaching, they supported each other holistically. Through the participants' own voices, the lived experiences of the student teachers indicate that the design and intention of this study have been successful.

Weaknesses of this study

As indicated in the recommendations for future research, a weakness of this study is the limited number of participants, all of which were female. The percentage of female

elementary teachers in the United States is 89%, which is largely in line with the population of this study (*The Condition of Education, 2020*). Nonetheless, it would have been a benefit to this study to have had a male perspective represented.

As indicated in the previous section, out of concern for the additional stress this study could cause the participants, I chose not to interview the participants several times. More interview data would have potentially made this study more complete. And, since the study took place at the same time the participants were graduating, their time was very limited due to their beginning their lives as professionals. Most had already accepted teaching positions and were excitedly preparing for their new classrooms. Nearly all of them were moving from the housing where they lived during student teaching and several of them were moving out-of-state. This limited their availability for interviews and participation in the focus group.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings in relationship with current literature. The findings suggest that CPM groups enhanced development of the student teachers' teacher identity through the demonstration of agentive acts. The CPM groups also seemed to afford the student teachers with the opportunity to use their voice, power, and choice in order to better their teaching. An unexpected finding was that the student teachers amplified their access to "old-timers," creating an expanded legitimate peripheral participation in their communities of practice.

I started this study with a quote from Sonia Nieto, which stated

> *Those who can, teach*. Teaching *is* doing: It takes reflection, planning, nurturing, dreaming, scheming, imagining, effecting, judging, succeeding, failing, improving, and then figuring it out all over again. It takes imagination, perseverance, and lots of courage. Teaching is not for the faint of heart. It is not easy; it never has been" (emphasis in original) (Nieto, 2014, p. 9).

We have known the complex, and often difficult, aspects of teaching for decades, yet as a profession, we continue with the status quo. We continue to provide traditional forms of induction which have inherent power hierarchy differentials. To be sure, many times the traditional student teacher/cooperating teacher model work, and we transition student teachers into the profession. But, sometimes the model does not work. And even in the best cases, don't we want to be better and improve? This study provides an additional support for our student teachers, with the hope that we are sending our newest colleagues into their classrooms with the best possible information. Indeed, as Group F stated in their capstone project, "We are the new generation of teachers." As our newest colleagues, they deserve all of the supports we can provide, because the ultimate beneficiaries of great, well-supported teachers are the students in their classrooms. And they certainly deserve our very best.

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Appendices

Appendix A IRB Approval letter

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Official Approval Letter for IRB project #20813 - New Project Form

December 4, 2020

Cindy Linzell
Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education
HENZ 118 UNL NE 685880355

Jenelle Reeves
Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education
HENZ 44C UNL NE 685880355

IRB Number: 20201220813EX
Project ID: 20813
Project Title: Utilizing Critical Peer Mentor Groups to Support Pre-service Teachers during their Student Teaching Experience

Dear Cindy:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects at 45 CFR 46 2018 Requirements and has been classified as exempt. Exempt categories are listed within HRPP Policy #4.001: Exempt Research available at:
http://research.unl.edu/researchcompliance/policies-procedures/.

o Date of Final Exemption: 12/4/2020
o Certification of Exemption Valid-Until: 12/4/2025
o Review conducted using exempt category 1 and 2b at 45 CFR 46.104
o Funding (Grant congruency, OSP Project/Form ID and Funding Sponsor Award Number, if applicable): N/A

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any protocol violation or protocol deviation
* An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners
* Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

Full Accreditation

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Office of Research and Economic Development
nugrant.unl.edu

NUgrant

Appendix B Recruitment script

Dear TEAC 403A students,

Congratulations! You have made it to your student teaching semester! This semester will be filled with excitement and much learning. This course is designed to provide you with added supports to help your semester to be successful. My name is Cindy Linzell and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. I am conducting a research study to understand and inform the needed support for pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience, to not only utilize the resources they have learned in their teacher preparation program, but also serve as Critical Peer Mentors for their peers. I would like to ask for your participation. Participation will include three parts:

1. Your TEAC 403A assignments that are turned in on Canvas (just like you normally do)
2. One individual interview at the end of the semester (1 hour on Zoom)
3. One focus group interview with your Critical Peer Mentor group (1 hour on Zoom)

Besides the completion of your assignments for TEAC 403A, which you will be completing regardless of your participation in this study, your total additional time for this study is no more than two hours. Note: As the researcher on this study, I will not be grading any of your course assignments, nor will I discuss any of your assignments with Dr. Gray.

I would appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. I will be coming to your first seminar to talk about this further, but I wanted to get this to you before next Wednesday. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them (clinzell@huskers.unl.edu) or you can contact Dr. Jenelle Reeves (jreeves2@unl.edu). Thank you for your consideration, and I'll see you next Wednesday!

Sincerely,

Cindy H. Linzell

Appendix C Informed consent

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Informed Consent Form

Dear Student Teacher,

You have been invited to participate in the research study, Utilizing Critical Peer Mentor Groups to Support Pre-service Teachers during their Student Teaching Experience. Your participation could give education professionals better insight into how to provide needed support for pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience to not only utilize the resources they have learned in their teacher preparation program, but also serve as critical peer mentors. This research could also inform methods teaching in classes prior to graduation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Please read this informed consent letter, and if you are willing to participate, sign it. You will receive a copy of the signed letter for your own records. Thank you for participating in this study!

Title: Utilizing Critical Peer Mentor groups to support pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the use of Critical Peer Mentors to support pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience.

Procedures: Participation in this study will consist of the following:

- The use of your TEAC 403A assignments as data, which will be completed on Canvas like any normal assignment. You will not do anything additional to your assignments, simply turn them in. The researcher will not participate in any grading of your course assignments.
- One Individual Interview, lasting no more than one hour will take place on Zoom, at a convenient time for the pre-service teacher. This interview will take place at the end of the semester. Individual Interviews will be recorded on Zoom.
- One Critical Peer Mentor (Focus) whole group interview, lasting no more than one hour will take place on Zoom. The interview will take place at the end of the semester. Focus groups will be recorded in Zoom.

_____ Initial

- Zoom protocol for Participants:
    - For security and confidentiality precautions, the following have been included per the UNL COVID-19 protocol:
    - Wait for host to join will be enabled
    - Participants ability to record the video session will be disabled
    - Use of a password to enter a virtual meeting space will be required
    - The screen-sharing feature will be used with caution only the researcher will screen-share. Screen share will be exited immediately if the shared content becomes problematic.
    - Participants will be directed to close all other programs, windows, software, browser tabs, etc. during the research-related call to ensure privacy.
    - The Chat feature will only be used as initiated by the researcher. No confidential information will be shared via Chat.
    - The Zoom recording will be saved to the local computer. Transcription of the local recording will be done using Sonix.
- Total time: 2 hours per semester in addition to your course assignments

Benefits:
This study has the potential to give education professionals better insight into the preparation of pre-service teachers, and how they enact this preparation in their mainstream classrooms.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks associated with this research. In the event of problems resulting from participation in the study, the participants can contact the first investigator (402)-472-2231.

Confidentiality:
All information provided to the researcher throughout through participation in this study will be protected. The student's real name will not be used and the information will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the study and in any publication or presentation of the study findings. Your information could be used or distributed to another researcher for future research studies without an additional informed consent from you. Identifiers (name, dates, etc.) will be removed prior to being distributed.

_____ Initial

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may contact the researcher at (402) 472-2231 or by email at clinzell@huskers.unl.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

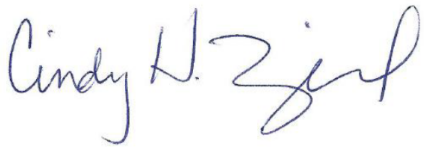
Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in this study, and that you have read and understood the purpose, procedures, and safeguards of the study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous. This survey should be completed after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at: http://bit.ly/UNLresearchfeedback.

Signatures:

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date



February 3, 2021

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date

Contact Information

Cindy Linzell: clinzell@huskers.unl.edu; (402) 472-2231
Dr. Jenelle Reeves: jreeves@unl.edu; (402) 472-2231

Appendix D Syllabus

Spring 2021

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES

TEAC 403A Student Teaching Capstone Seminar

Dr. Trish Gray (she/her), Instructor
tgray5@unl.edu
114D Henzlik
Office hours: By appointment via Zoom
Zoom passcode: SPRING403A

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement[1]

What we now call the state of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was established through the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862 on the ancestral lands[2] of the *Arapaho*, *Hidatsa*, *Missouria*, *Sac and Fox*, *Arikara*, *Jicarilla Apache*, *U'MoHo^n*, *Dakota Sioux*, *Northern Cheyenne*, *Iowa*, *Otoe*, *Lakota Sioux*, *Southern Cheyenne*, *Kickapoo*, *Pawnee*, *Nakota Sioux*, *Comanche*, *Kiowa*, *Ponca*, *Santee Sioux*, *Crow*, *Mandan*, *Potawatomie*, and *Winnebago*. It is important to acknowledge the individual and collective contributions and sacrifices these Tribes have made to our understanding of the world and our relationship to the land as we pursue education in the institution these Tribes made possible. As such, we must be deliberate about our responsibility as educators to honor the vibrant and robust Native American cultures and citizens who exist *right now*, to value and teach Indigenous histories (even when it's hard), and to seek and include multiple perspectives and languages in our teaching and learning.

Course Description

TEAC 403A is the Capstone seminar for the Elementary Education program. This hybrid course will accompany the student teaching experience. We will meet for six sessions addressing different issues that complement the pre-service teaching experience and facilitate the development of a reflective capstone project; you will also participate in collaborations on Canvas and via Zoom video conferencing. Students will demonstrate their growth by synthesizing evidence from across learning experiences. This reflective project will be scaffolded throughout the semester and then shared with peers and faculty members at the end of the semester.

Course Goals

1. Reflect on your development as an educator.
2. Increase awareness and development of your teacher identity.

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[1] Sources: (https://landgrant.unl.edu/history) (https://native-land.ca/) (https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities)

[2] The University of Nebraska-Lincoln sits directly on the ancestral lands of the Pawnee, the Očeti Sioux, and the Otoe. However, firm borders are a colonialist construction, and all the Tribes listed have historical ties to what we now know as the state of Nebraska. In addition, land from the Tribes of what is now northeastern Nebraska was claimed to start our university.

3. Develop skills as a critical peer mentor who supports and challenges peers.
4. Build an enduring and sustainable collaborative of critical peer mentors.
5. Analyze artifacts to systematically reflect on your growth as an educator.
6. Show competency as a reflective, collaborative, and professional educator through a presentation.

ACE 10 Outcome

Generate a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection.

ACE 10 Assignment: Capstone Presentation

The capstone project will be a group presentation shared live on **April 30** during the seminar session. Each person in the group will have an individual role in the presentation. These presentations will be recorded. In the presentation you will reflect on your learning experiences within your critical peer mentor groups. The ACE 10 assignment description will guide the development of your presentation. The ACE 10 rubric will be used to offer feedback on your presentation. We will spend time together discussing the expectations in each criterion of the rubric.

Course Requirements

There is no required text for the course. Readings and media artifacts will be available in **Canvas/Perusall**. You will need to create a free Perusall account at Perusall.com and use our course code to join: **GRAY-RE2NX**. Please be sure that you have access to dependable internet service, a laptop or other Zoom-capable device, and headphones for our synchronous **Zoom** meetings. You will also need access to **Canvas** and email throughout the semester. Because CPM meetings will be over Zoom and independent of Dr. Gray, you will need a Zoom account. **Please** check your email and visit the course Canvas course page regularly.

***Course meetings will be via Zoom.**

Course Policies

Statement on Equity and Inclusion: Every person in this course matters, and we all grow from the unique backgrounds and experiences each person brings to the course. Actions that attempt to exclude others cannot be tolerated; however, ideas grounded in misinformation or hate also cannot be tolerated. I hope that we will all strive to co-construct a class culture in which we view one another as humans worthy of dignity and respect, regardless of and perhaps because of the differences among us.

UNL Policies

- Guidance for Students with Disabilities
- Academic Honesty
- Masks
- Recording

Spring 2021

Course Policies

- Professionalism
- Grading Scale

Seminar Meeting Schedule

The class will meet six times throughout the semester via Zoom. Each seminar will be two hours. These sessions are in addition to your critical peer mentor group meetings. Seminar dates and times are listed below; you will be excused from your student teaching during these times (if they are during school hours).

Seminar	Date and time
Seminar 1	Wednesday, February 3 2:00-4:00pm Central time https://unl.zoom.us/j/91615200328
Seminar 2	Wednesday, February 17 2:00-4:00pm Central time https://go.unl.edu/seminar2
Seminar 3	Wednesday, March 3 2:00-4:00pm Central time https://unl.zoom.us/j/92064583816?pwd=VWxraE5QMk5LQ1piME1JQk8xbVVlQT09 Passcode: SPRING403A
Seminar 4	Wednesday, March 24 2:00-4:00pm Central time
Seminar 5	Wednesday, April 7 2:00-4:00pm Central time
Seminar 6	Friday, April 30 9:00am-1:00pm Central time https://unl.zoom.us/j/99890301490

Assignments

The assignments and assignments timeline are tentative and may be modified at the instructor's discretion. However, no assignments will be added, and you will be given plenty of notice of any changes. Some assignments will be completed in Canvas; others will be completed in Google applications (accessible through Canvas or via link). See the assignments timeline for due dates. Your critical peer mentoring group (CPM) meetings will take place via Zoom, and the recordings of your CPM meetings will be uploaded to Box. Capstone projects will be shared live (and recorded) in our capstone fair online **April 30. Attendance at all seminar sessions is required. Please communicate with Dr. Gray if you have to miss one.**

Spring 2021

Assignment	Description
Participation in seminars	You will participate in five 2-hour seminars throughout the semester and one 4-hour seminar at the end of the semester. You will be excused from your student teaching to attend the seminars scheduled during school hours. All six seminars will be via Zoom videoconference and will be recorded.
Readings and annotations in Perusall	All students will read the same reading during module 1. For modules 2-5, your CPM group will select the readings and/or media artifacts to explore together for each module (total of five readings/media artifacts). You will use the Perusall social annotation tool to make **at least five** annotations throughout each reading and engage with what others in your group are thinking by **upvoting at least two** of your peers' posts. This assignment requires a (free) Perusall account. You will learn how to use Perusall during our first seminar.
Reflection	You will write a reflection during each of the modules 1-5. Reflections will be three paragraphs, and guided prompts will be provided in each module. These reflections will be uploaded to Canvas.
CPM meetings	Your critical peer mentoring (CPM) groups will be at the center of the course. You will indicate preferences to inform the organization of these groups. Groups will meet one time via Zoom (~ one hour) during each module. These meetings will be recorded and the recordings uploaded to a shared Box folder. The folder invitation was sent to the email address you provided on the Google form. Please use the following naming convention for your recordings: MODULE [1]_[LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS] **Example**: MODULE 2_GRAY, THORBURN, BRADLEY, SHERMAN, FIRESTONE

Appendix E Modules

Spring 2021 [Revised 10.31.20] **TEAC 403A** Modules

Module 1: January 25-February 7		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Enter information into **Google Form** (sent via email)	January 15	5
Review syllabus and take syllabus quiz **on Canvas**	January 31	10
Participate in seminar 1 (orientation to the course and getting to know your CPM)	February 3	10
Reading/annotation in Perusall (completed during seminar 1)	February 3	10
CPM group meeting recording (from seminar 1): Upload to Box folder MODULE 1_LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	February 7	10
Reflection 1 (including goals and aspirations for critical peer mentoring group)	February 7	10

Module 2: February 8-21		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Reading/annotation in Perusall	February 14	10
Participate in seminar 2 (discussing dilemmas)	February 17	10
CPM group meeting recording: Upload to Box folder MODULE 2_LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	February 21	10
Reflection 2: Upload to Canvas (prompts in Canvas assignment)	February 21	10

Module 3: February 22-March 7		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Reading/annotation in Perusall	February 28	10
Participate in seminar 3 (learning to code reflections)	March 3	10
CPM group meeting recording: Upload to Box folder MODULE 3_LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	March 7	10
Reflection 3: Upload to Canvas (prompts in Canvas assignment)	March 7	10

Spring 2021 [Revised 10.31.20] **TEAC 403A** Modules

Module 4: March 8-28		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Reading/annotation in Perusall	March 21	10
Participate in seminar 4 (crafting your group's story)	March 24	10
CPM group meeting recording: Upload to Box folder MODULE 4_LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	March 28	10
Reflection 4: Upload to Canvas (prompts in Canvas assignment)	March 28	10

Module 5: March 29-April 11		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Reading/annotation in Perusall	April 5	10
Participate in seminar 5 (refining your group's story)	April 7	10
CPM group meeting recording: Upload to Box folder MODULE 5_LAST NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	April 11	10
Reflection 5: Upload to Canvas (prompts in Canvas assignment)	April 11	10

Module 6: April 12-April 30		
Assignment	***Due date***	***Points***
Upload a draft of your group's slides	April 20	10
Participate in seminar 6 (sharing your presentation and engaging with another group's presentation)	April 30	10
Capstone project presentation (see ACE 10 rubric)	April 30	10
Complete exit survey **on Canvas**	April 30	10

Appendix F Google Form

TEAC 403A - Spring 2021 - Course roster information

Please complete all questions and submit your responses by the end of the day, Friday, January 15. While the course does not start until January 25, the information from this form helps get everyone organized for our work together.

* Required

1. What is your full name (first and last) as it appears on Canvas? *

2. What is your preferred name? *

3. Please upload a photo of you that clearly shows your face. (The photo file size can be no larger than 1 MB.) *

   Files submitted:

4. Please enter your email address. *

5. Please check that your email in your Canvas account profile is the one you will check frequently throughout the semester. (Check one statement below.) *

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ I have verified that my email address is correct in Canvas.

Student teaching placement information

Please provide information about your student teaching placement this semester.

6. What is the name of your SCHOOL where you are student teaching? *

_____

7. What is the name of the DISTRICT where you are student teaching? *

_____

8. In what GRADE LEVEL are you student teaching? *

_____

9. In what CITY and STATE are you located? *

_____

10. In what TIME ZONE are you located? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Eastern time (New York, Florida, etc.)
- ◯ Central time (Nebraska, Texas, etc.)
- ◯ Mountain time (far western Nebraska, Colorado, etc.)
- ◯ Pacific time (California, Washington state, etc.)
- ◯ Other: _____

11. Select ALL the statements below that apply to you. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] I am student teaching in elementary education only this semester.
- [ ] I am completing elementary education and special education student teaching placements this semester.
- [ ] I will graduate with inclusive early childhood certification.
- [ ] I will graduate with dual sped/el ed certification, but I am only completing one placement this semester.
- [ ] I have another situation not described above. (Please explain your situation in the "Other" space below.

Other: [ ] _____

Seminar scheduling

As part of this course, you will participate in five 2-hour seminars throughout the semester AND one 4-hour seminar at the end of the semester. You will be excused from your student teaching to attend these seminars if they are during the school day. All six seminars will be via Zoom videoconference and will be recorded.

The final seminar on April 30 will be from 9:00am-1:00pm. Please provide your preferences below on the scheduling of each of the other five seminars.

12. Wednesday, February 3 seminar: Check your TOP TWO preferences for this seminar. Note that there are options inside and outside of school hours. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 8:00-10:00am
- [ ] 10:00am-12:00pm
- [ ] 12:00-2:00pm
- [ ] 2:00-4:00pm
- [ ] 4:00-6:00pm
- [ ] 5:00-7:00pm
- [ ] 6:00-8:00pm

13. Monday, February 15 seminar: Check your TOP TWO preferences for this seminar. Note that there are options inside and outside of school hours. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 8:00-10:00am
- [ ] 10:00am-12:00pm
- [ ] 12:00-2:00pm
- [ ] 2:00-4:00pm
- [ ] 4:00-6:00pm
- [ ] 5:00-7:00pm
- [ ] 6:00-8:00pm

14. Wednesday, March 3 seminar: Check your TOP TWO preferences for this seminar. Note that there are options inside and outside of school hours. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 8:00-10:00am
- [ ] 10:00am-12:00pm
- [ ] 12:00-2:00pm
- [ ] 2:00-4:00pm
- [ ] 4:00-6:00pm
- [ ] 5:00-7:00pm
- [ ] 6:00-8:00pm

15. Wednesday, March 24 seminar: Check your TOP TWO preferences for this seminar. Note that there are options inside and outside of school hours. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 8:00-10:00am
- [ ] 10:00am-12:00pm
- [ ] 12:00-2:00pm
- [ ] 2:00-4:00pm
- [ ] 4:00-6:00pm
- [ ] 5:00-7:00pm
- [ ] 6:00-8:00pm

16. Wednesday, April 7 seminar: Check your TOP TWO preferences for this seminar. Note that there are options inside and outside of school hours. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 8:00-10:00am
- [ ] 10:00am-12:00pm
- [ ] 12:00-2:00pm
- [ ] 2:00-4:00pm
- [ ] 4:00-6:00pm
- [ ] 5:00-7:00pm
- [ ] 6:00-8:00pm

17. If there is a specific date and/or time that absolutely will not work for you, please include that information below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Critical Peer Mentor (CPM) groups

Critical Peer Mentor groups are strategically formed groups of peers who will support and challenge one another throughout your student teaching experiences (and perhaps beyond). Your critical peer mentor groups will be at the center of this course. Groups will meet one time via Zoom (~ one hour) during each module. These meetings will be recorded and the recordings uploaded to Canvas, along with a brief memo about the meeting. Please provide your responses to the following questions to indicate how you would like to be grouped.

18. Complete the sentence in each row. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	other student teachers in my same school.	other student teachers in my same district.	other student teachers who are teaching in the same grade level as I am.	other student teachers who I know are good thought partners for me.	other student teachers who express the same topics of interest to explore together.
I would MOST like to be in a Critical Peer Mentor group with...	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My second preference is to be in a CPM group with...	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My third preference is to be in a CPM group with...	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

19. Right now, is there anyone specific with whom you would like to be in a CPM group? If yes, you may name up to four peers below. (If not, you may skip this question.)

20. Right now, is there anyone specific with whom you would prefer NOT to be in a CPM group? If yes, you may name up to four peers below. (If not, you may skip this question.)

Topics to explore

We want to support your continued growth throughout this student teaching semester. Consider topics you feel the need to explore further and areas in which you wish you had more preparation.

21. What unique challenges are you finding in your school and/or classroom? *

22. What unique opportunities does your school and/or classroom offer for your growth? *

23. Complete the sentence: "In my teacher preparation program, I wish I would have learned more about..." *

Thinking about graduation and beyond

You have a number of opportunities after graduation. You do not have to know right now what you want to do, but consider which kinds of opportunities you are hoping to pursue.

24. Which opportunities are you currently considering for after graduation? Check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] I plan to pursue a teaching job in a general education classroom.
- [ ] I plan to pursue a teaching job in a special education classroom.
- [ ] I plan to pursue full-time graduate school.
- [ ] I plan to pursue part-time graduate school while pursuing a full-time teaching job.
- [ ] I do not plan to pursue a teaching job.
- [ ] Other: _____

25. If you are pursuing a teaching job, where do you hope to be (i.e., city or district)? *

_____

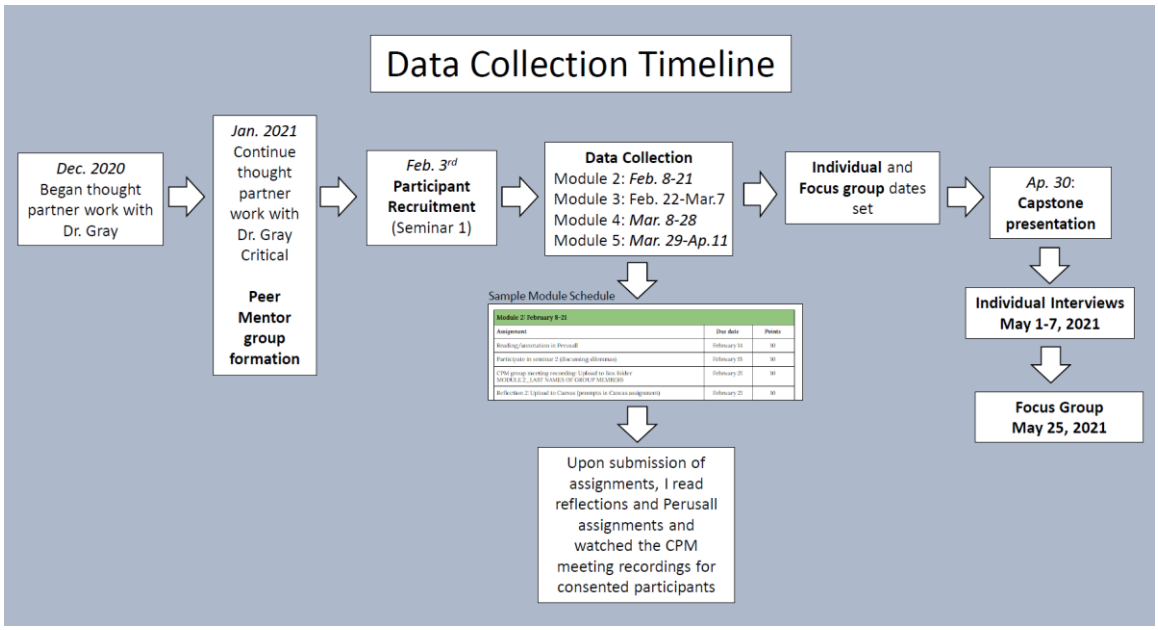
26. For which topics do you want more information and/or guidance during this semester? (Check all that apply.) *

Check all that apply.

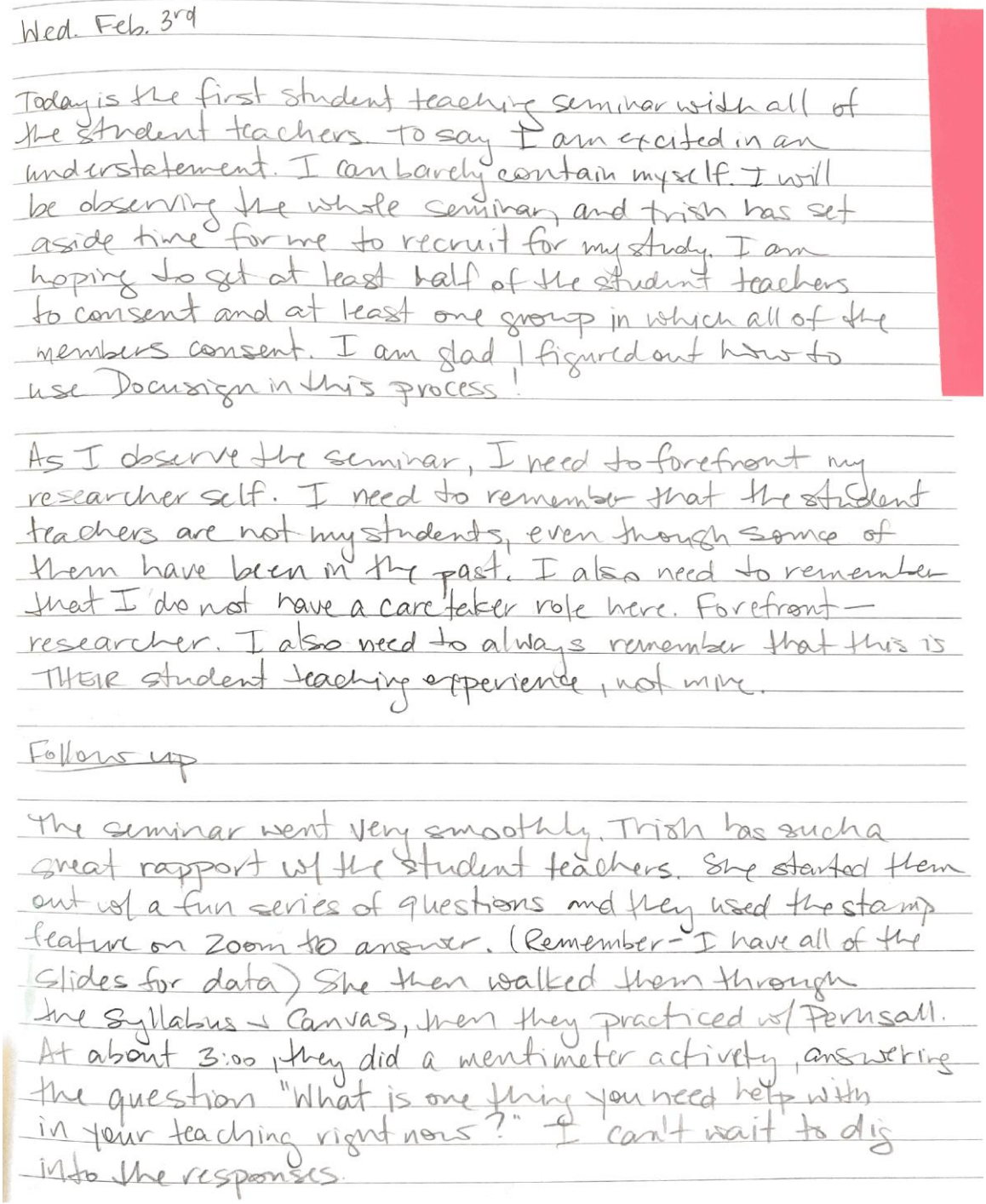
- [ ] Praxis 2 test
- [ ] Getting a teacher license
- [ ] Considering membership in teacher professional organizations
- [ ] Job search (e.g., writing a resume/cover letter, interviewing, etc.)
- [ ] Graduate school (i.e., Master's Degree programs)
- [ ] Job opportunities outside of PK-12 schools

Other: ☐ _____

Appendix G Data Collection Timeline



Appendix H Journaling Examples



Wed. Feb. 3rd

Today is the first student teaching seminar with all of the student teachers. To say I am excited is an understatement. I can barely contain myself. I will be observing the whole seminar, and Trish has set aside time for me to recruit for my study. I am hoping to get at least half of the student teachers to consent and at least one group in which all of the members consent. I am glad I figured out how to use Docusign in this process!

As I observe the seminar, I need to forefront my researcher self. I need to remember that the student teachers are not my students, even though some of them have been in the past. I also need to remember that I do not have a caretaker role here. Forefront — researcher. I also need to always remember that this is THEIR student teaching experience, not mine.

Follows up

The seminar went very smoothly. Trish has such a great rapport w/ the student teachers. She started them out w/ a fun series of questions and they used the stamp feature on Zoom to answer. (Remember - I have all of the slides for data) She then walked them through the Syllabus + Canvas, then they practiced w/ Perusall. At about 3:00, they did a mentimeter activity, answering the question "What is one thing you need help with in your teaching right now?" I can't wait to dig into the responses.

Wednesday, Feb. 10

The student teachers first Module assignments were due on Sunday. Trish - I gave them a couple of extra days before she downloaded them for me. It looks like they are, for the most part, all there. As I start to read and process the assignments today, I need to remember 1. I am not their teacher
2. This is their student teaching experience
3. I am looking at the data
1st what is the lived experience
2nd what evidence do I see of teacher identity development in this lived experience
3rd does positioning play a role in any of this - what is the evidence
4. I need to always remember my researcher lens, but use my own teaching experience as a guide

Saturday, Feb 13

I am continuing to work through Module 1 today. I need to remember all that I wrote on Wed. New problem - not all of the student teachers have their name on in Zoom. I'm going to have to troubleshoot.

Appendix I Perusall readings and videos

Perusal Articles and Videos

Title	Type of Resource	Key words	Summary
Binder, M. (2012). **Teaching as lived research**. *Childhood Education, 88(2)*, pp. 118-120.	Article	teacher researcher, teacher inquiry, lived classroom, action research	In this article, the author reflects on her own teacher-researcher journey to explore issues that others may encounter as they recognize the important role of the practitioner as researcher in primary and secondary classrooms, and beyond. She offers the position of teaching as lived research, whereby everyday classroom experiences open a critical space for making teacher voice visible through educational inquiry.
Boroditsky, L. (2017). **How languages shape the way we think**. TED Women. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think?referrer=playlist-the_most_popular_ted_talks_of_2018	Video	language, learning, funds of knowledge	Do languages shape the way we think? Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky shares examples of language that suggest the answer is a resounding yes. "The beauty of linguistic diversity is that it reveals to us just how ingenious and how flexible the human mind is."
Boyd, M., Jarmark, C. & Edmiston, B. (2018). **Building bridges: Coauthoring a class handshake, building community**. *Pedagogies: An International Journal, 13(4)*, pp. 330-352.	Journal article	classroom community, morning meeting	The authors of this paper discuss the importance of coauthoring a class handshake to build classroom community. This article is provided as an example of how working together to create something as a class provides the context for classroom community. However, in the COVID-19 era, asking children to purposely shake hands is not wise. But, what else could you create? A class dance for brain break? A special way to walk in the hall? A morning greeting or an afternoon good-bye? What would work in your classroom?
Denton, P. (2014). **Reinforcing, reminding, and redirecting**. *Responsive Classroom* Retrieved from	Online article	power of words, teacher language	What children hear and interpret—the message they get from their teacher—has a huge impact on how they think and act, and ultimately how they learn. When students are

https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/reinforcing-reminding-and-redirecting/			being challenged with rigorous standards, it's vitally important for teachers to use language deliberately, as a tool to support children's learning. Skillful communication with students will be the linchpin that allows teachers to get the most out of whatever other instructional techniques they use. The authors describe one way for teachers to harness the power of their language is to pay attention to the "3 Rs"—reinforcing language, reminding language, and redirecting language—that are part of the *Responsive Classroom* approach to teacher language.
Dray, B. & Wisneski, D. (2011). **Mindful reflection as a process for developing culturally responsive practices**. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 44(1)*, pp. 28-36.	Journal article	culturally responsive, special education, cultural diversity, mindful reflection, deficit thinking, classroom communication	Teachers are not often aware of how diversity affects the way that they interpret students' actions and the ways that they interact with their students. Teachers may misinterpret a cultural difference as a potential disability. In this article, the authors explore how diversity influences teachers' perceptions of behavior and how the use of mindful reflection and communication helps support the development of culturally responsive practices.
Driscoll, L. (n.d.). **What we say matters. Improving teacher language as part of SEL implementation**. Social Emotional Workshop. Retrieved from https://www.socialemotionalworkshop.com/2018/01/sel-practice-teacher-language/	Online article	positive teacher language, student effort	The author of this article provides 10 ways to improve teacher language in the classroom. She provides examples of what to say in order to reward student effort and enhance the learning environment in the classroom.
Emdin, C. (2012). **Reality Pedagogy.** TEDx Teachers College. Retrieved from	Video	racial justice, equity, peace, equality	Dr. Christopher Emdin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology at Teachers College, Columbia University; where he also

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y9tVf_8fqo			serves as Director of the Science Education program and Associate Director of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education. In this talk, Dr. Emdin names Reality Pedagogy as a way to embody the true meaning and role of "peace", "justice", "equity" and "equality" in the classroom.
García, O. (2011). **Theorizing translanguaging for educators**. In *Translanguaging: A CUNY_NYSEIB Guide for Educators*. The CUNY Graduate Center: New York.	Book excerpt	translanguaging, language acquisition, multilingual students	In this excerpt, the author explains the definition of translanguaging and how translanguaging plays an important role in the learning of multilingual students. She gives guidance as to what translanguaging can and should look like in the classroom. So much has been learned about multilingualism the past twenty years. Translanguaging states that multilingual students need to be given the opportunity to use their full linguistic repertoire in order to make meaning of the content. This means that teachers need to know and understand how to utilize a student's first language in the classroom. The researchers at CUNY-NYSIEB offer real, authentic classroom materials and experiences the better understand the concept and provide teachers with resources to have a translanguaging classroom. Click on the following link for more information. https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/
Jensen, S. (2019). **How can we support the emotional well-being of teachers?** TED Talks. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/sydney_jensen_how_can_we_support_the_emotional_well_being_of_teachers	Video	teacher support, secondary trauma	Teachers emotionally support our children-- but who's supporting our teachers? In this eye-opening talk, educator Sydney Jensen explores how teachers are at risk of "secondary trauma" -- the idea that they absorb the emotional weight of their students' experiences -- and shows how schools can get creative in supporting everyone's mental health and wellness.

Lopez-Robertson, J. & Haney, M.J. (2017). **Their eyes sparkled: Building classroom community through multicultural literature**. *Journal of Children's Literature, 43(1)*, pp. 48-54.	Journal article	multicultural literature, funds of knowledge, classroom community, reading to writing	In this article, the authors describe the use of a children's book that mirrors the racial identity of the students in the classroom. The students identify with the book and make meaningful connections to themselves. The authors then describe the transition from reading to writing, and detail the transition from reading to writing.
Paley, V. (1986). **On listening to what children say**. *Harvard Educational Review, 56(2)*, pp.122-131.	Journal article	listening, curiosity	In this article, the author uses stories from her own classroom to demonstrate what can be learned when you listen to children. She emphasizes the need for curiosity to genuinely understand what children are telling us. By doing this, the child feels, and is respected.
Pierson, R. (2013). **Every kid needs a champion.** TED Talks Education. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion?language=en	Video	funds of knowledge, classroom community	Rita Pierson, a teacher for 40 years, once heard a colleague say, "They don't pay me to like the kids." Her response: "Kids don't learn from people they don't like.'" This video is a call to educators to believe in their students and actually connect with them on a real, human, personal level.
RSA Animate: **How to help every child fulfill their potential**. (2015). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yl9TVbAal5s	Video	growth mindset, praise, feedback	In this video, educationalist Carol Dweck explains how the wrong kind of praise actually *harms* young people. She explains important ways for you to interact with children so that they have a growth mindset of intelligence and not a fixed mindset of intelligence.
Templeton, B. (2013). **"Why is that child so rude?"** *Educational Leadership*.	Article	funds of knowledge, compassion, empathy, poverty	This article discusses the need for teachers to understand a student's home life in order to understand classroom behavior. Understanding what a student brings from home, their funds of knowledge, enables a teacher to provide a classroom environment in which all children can learn and succeed.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). **What is backwards design?** *Understanding by Design.* ASCD: New York.	Book Chapter	curriculum, assessment, design, standards, evidence of understanding	This book chapter describes the process of designing and implementing lessons by focusing on the desired results (goals or standards) and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip students to perform. It also describes the need for assessment throughout the curriculum, and not simply at the end once the teaching is completed. This chapter will give you step-by-step instructions to design your lesson using backwards design.
Zoch, M. (2017). **It's important to know who they are: Teachers' efforts to sustain students' cultural competence in an age of high-stakes testing**. *Urban Education, 52(5)*, pp. 610-636.	Journal article	culturally sustaining pedagogy	This article examines how four urban elementary teachers designed their literacy instruction in ways that sought to sustain students' cultural competence – maintaining their language and cultural practices while also gaining access to more dominant ones – amid expectations to prepare their students for high-stakes testing. A large part of their teaching involved taking their students' backgrounds into account and selecting classroom texts to provide examples of the contributions made by successful culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people with space for dialogue about inequity.

Appendix J Reflective journal guiding questions

Reflection 1

Due Feb 7 by 11:59pm **Points** 10 **Submitting** a text entry box, a media recording, or a file upload

You will write a reflection during each module of this course. Your reflection should be three paragraphs long, and each paragraph has a specific prompt. For this reflection, please respond to the following three questions:

- What are your CPM group's goals and aspirations for your semester together? How did you construct these?
- What are your personal goals and aspirations for this semester?
- How are you feeling right now about your development as a teacher?

Your reflection is due February 7.

Reflection 2

Due Feb 21 by 11:59pm **Points** 10 **Submitting** a text entry box, a website url, or a file upload

Your reflection should be three paragraphs long, and each paragraph has a specific prompt. For this reflection, please respond to the following three questions:

- What did your CPM group select to read/view together in Perusall? What are your personal takeaways from the article/video?
- What were the group's takeaways from the article/video?
- How did the article/video connect to your group's goals and aspirations?

Your reflection is due February 21.

Reflection 3

Due Mar 7 by 11:59pm **Points** 10 **Submitting** a text entry box or a file upload

Your reflection should be three paragraphs long, and each paragraph has a specific prompt. For this reflection, please respond to the following three questions:

- What did your CPM group select to read/view together in Perusall? What are your personal takeaways from the article/video?
- What were the group's takeaways from the article/video?
- How did the article/video connect to your group's goals and aspirations?

Your reflection is due March 7.

Reflection 4

Due Mar 28 by 11:59pm **Points** 10 **Submitting** a text entry box or a file upload

Your reflection should be three paragraphs long, and each paragraph has a specific prompt. For this reflection, please respond to the following three questions:

- What did your CPM group select to read/view together in Perusall? What are your personal and your CPM group's takeaways from the article/video?
- After having had some time to reflect on stages of community and coding your reflections, what connections to your CPM group have emerged? What connections to your student teaching experience have emerged?
- How have your experiences in this module (Perusall video/article, CPM group time, seminar) connected to your group's goals and aspirations?

Your reflection is due March 28.

Reflection 5

Due Apr 11 by 11:59pm **Points** 10 **Submitting** a text entry box or a file upload

Your reflection should be three paragraphs long, and each paragraph has a specific prompt. For this reflection, please respond to the following three questions:

- What are your CPM group's big ideas for your group presentation? What evidence supports those?
- What are your personal statements about your philosophy of teaching and learning? What program experiences have helped you developed your philosophy?
- Considering your CPM group's and your personal goals and aspirations for your work in this course this semester, what's next for you on your learning journey?

Your reflection is due April 11.

Appendix K Capstone assignment

TEAC 403A
ACE 10 Assignment: Capstone Presentation

Generate a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection.

Throughout your experience in the Elementary Teacher Education Program (ETEP), you have documented your growth in the Dimensions of Teaching. In this course, we will specifically attend to your development in dimensions #13 (**Collaborative Relations and Professional Conduct**) and #14 (**Reflective Practices and Professional Growth**) through whole group seminars and engagement in Critical Peer Mentoring (CPM) groups. Your capstone project will be a group oral presentation that tells the story of your growth as an educator and colleague.

You will have input in constructing your critical peer mentoring (CPM) group, the group with whom you will engage in inquiry around shared dilemmas in your practice throughout the semester. As the semester progresses, you will have opportunities for reflection about your CPM group's growth and how you have learned together. Through analysis of your reflections and other materials from your experiences this semester and throughout the ETEP courses and practicum experiences, you will articulate a personal teaching philosophy and describe how your identity and experiences helped to construct your philosophy. Your CPM group will explore your collective learning and what it means for you as educators transitioning into your professional roles.

As a group, you will construct a presentation that includes all group members' voices and tells your group's unique learning story. The presentation will ask you to engage in reflection on your growth in your own understanding of the field, your collaboration with critical peer mentors, and the professional path still ahead of you. Your presentation should include digital slides to be shared with your audience. The group capstone presentation will be shared during our sixth and final meeting of the semester, and it will be recorded.

Project development will be scaffolded throughout the semester through course seminars and assignments. The ACE 10 rubric will provide you with a clear set of expectations for presentation.

In the presentation:

Each member will share

- an introduction (name, student teaching information): Who are you? Where were you doing your learning with students this semester?
- a description of the parts of your identity/experiences that influence who you are as a teacher: Where are you from? How has that shaped who you are as a teacher? How have race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, ability shaped who you are as a teacher?
- a statement of your teaching philosophy and why/how it contributes to positive student experiences and outcomes (citing program experiences and learning materials that helped construct this philosophy): What do you believe about teaching and learning? What do you believe about students? How did you come to hold these beliefs?

Each CPM group will share

- a visual that demonstrates the interconnecting concepts and/or big ideas in education as they relate to ETEP courses, experiences, and/or learning materials
- two to three big ideas that emerged through your work together: Upon analysis of your individual and CPM group meetings and reflections, what big ideas emerge?
- evidence that led you to identify the big ideas: What documented quotations or experiences stand out to you as critical learning moments for you?
- what your big ideas mean for you in practice: What do your big ideas mean for you moving forward (i.e., If you learned x, what does that mean you should do in practice?)?
- how you will continue developing as an educator: Given your big ideas, what directions will you explore in your future learning? How will you do that?

Appendix L Single point rubric

TEAC 403A Capstone Project Single-Point Rubric (Version 01.25.21)

Student _____ Faculty _____

Criteria	Recommendations for Growth	Meets Expectations	Evidence of Exceeding Expectations
Broad Knowledge of Overarching Concepts and/or Big Ideas in Education		Include *at least four* sources of *interconnected* concepts and/or big ideas from across ETEP courses and field experiences. *Sources* could include: course experiences, readings, media artifacts, etc. from program coursework and field experiences. To what extent do the presenters draw on a *variety* of relevant sources (minimum of three)? To what extent are the sources *interconnected*?	
Integration of Dimensions of Teaching		Clearly articulates an understanding of how the dimensions of teaching are interconnected and offers multiple specific statements to support. To what extent does the group make connections among the dimensions of teaching?	
Information Collection & Analysis		Collects and synthesizes information to reveal *significant insights, themes, or ideas.* *Information* will be drawn from reflections and other artifacts from throughout the program. These data will be coded as an analytical exercise. To what extent does the group offer clear	

		evidence of their claims? To what extent does the group explain their rationale for selection of their reflections of artifacts?	
Synthesis		Demonstrates *accurate and insightful* explanation of how their big ideas translate into teaching practice. To what extent does the group demonstrate how their big ideas translate into teaching practice?	
Presentation		Communicates effectively by organizing their ideas and using a visual to support the message. All group members contribute to the discussion. To what extent are the group's ideas organized? To what extent does the visual support their message? To what extent is the presentation inclusive of all group members?	
Reflection		Individuals offer multiple reflective statements about their growth and future goals AND the group collectively offers multiple statements about their growth during their time together. To what extent does the group offer reflective statements about their individual growth and future plans? To what extent does the group offer reflective statements about their collective growth?	

Summary Comments:

☐ This group has satisfactorily presented evidence of their professional growth.

Appendix M Individual interview protocol

Individual Interview Protocol

Theme: Opener

Having just completed your student teaching, and knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your January self?

Theme: CPM

What was your experience with your CPM group this semester?

Prompts: What did you most enjoy?

Did you feel valued by your CPM? In what ways?

Were there challenges? How did you overcome challenges? Can you give me an example or tell me a story?

Can you tell me about a time / incident when you were teaching that you wanted to share with your CPM group or ask advice? How did they advise you? Did you follow advice -- how did it turn out?

Were there situations that you felt hesitant to bring to your CPM group? Why?

Theme: CPM / Peer Mentor

How would your CPM group describe you as a peer mentor?

Prompts: What strengths do you bring to this role?

What type of mentorship did you receive from your CPM group this semester?

What are some things you would like to work on to improve your peer mentorship skills?

Theme: CT / Teaching Experience

How would your CT describe you as a teacher?

Prompts: Do you agree with this description? Why or why not?

What strengths do you bring as a teacher?

Did you feel valued by your CT? In what ways?

Theme: Future CPM / Values

Do you envision utilizing some form of CPM in the future?

Prompts: In what ways?

In your dream world, if you had every resource at your disposal, what would an ideal CPM look like?

What advice would you give to students starting a CPM group?

Is there anything you would have done differently based on what you know now?

Theme: Sociodemographic / Teaching Experiences (use if not addressed in earlier questions)

How would you describe your experiences as a student teacher.

Prompts: Can you describe your placement school and classroom?

How similar or dissimilar is your placement school compared to the school(s) you attended?

How do you think this affected your teaching and how you related to students?

Theme: Conclusion

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your CPM or student teaching experiences?

FOCUS Group: Yes No

Appendix N Focus group protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Theme: Opener

Question: Is there memory from your CPM group this semester makes you happy or smile?

Theme: CPM

Question: How did your CPM group work together?

Prompts: How were your meetings organized?

How/who ran your meetings?

Who brought up topics?

Theme: Critical topics

Question: How did your group discuss difficult topics

Prompts: What were some difficult topics?

Theme: CT

Question: How were your CPM group's CTs discussed during the semester?

Prompts: What relationships did your group have with your CTs?

What topics about your CTs were discussed?

Theme: Conclusion

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your CPM or student teaching experiences?