

Chapter 15

Mentorship Dimensions: A Tool for Mentoring Through Reflection in Teacher Education Practica



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Abstract This chapter examines the crucial role of reflection in mentoring pre-service teachers, emphasizing the divergent nature of practicum experiences and the need for tailored mentorship. It introduces the “Mentorship Dimensions,” a tool developed through 7 years of case-study research to support reflective practice. This tool can help university advisors, classroom teachers, and school leaders critically engage with their approaches to both mentorship and supporting the development of reflective practices. By providing a reflective tool and demonstrating its application in case examples, this chapter aims to enhance mentorship through the development of reflective practices in teacher-education practica.

15.1 Introduction

Practical field experiences have been identified as a very influential component of pre-service teacher education (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Glenn, 2006; Vick, 2006). Nonetheless, the degree to which the experience promotes positive professional development heavily depends on the support provided by school-based teachers and university personnel during the practicum (Khachatryan, 2015; Ovando, 2005). Similarly, the induction process for new teachers to the field is strongly influenced by the guidance provided by school administrators and colleagues. Despite this fact, limited attention is often directed towards preparing educators for the complex and multi-dimensional task of mentoring novice colleagues. This may be due to the expectation that educators already possess the skills to be effective mentors, but as Trevethan (2017) outlined, “good teaching does not guarantee that teachers will be good mentors” (p. 226). Rather, quality mentorship

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requires purposeful engagement and constant reflection to ensure mentoring practices meet the developmental needs of mentees.

This chapter will explore the divergent nature of mentoring practices and argue that school-based and university-based teacher educators act as mentors supporting the development of pre-service teachers. It will then introduce a reflective tool known as the “Mentoring Dimensions” and demonstrate how the tool can support principled mentoring practices grounded in contextual variables. The fundamental goal of the chapter is to elucidate mentoring as a complex undertaking that is most effectively engaged in through reflective practice.

15.2 Foundations of Mentorship

Mentorship is a concept that has an extensive history. The term ‘mentor’ was originally used in ancient Greek literature, specifically Homer’s *The Odyssey* (Daresh, 2004; Smith, 2017). In the epic tale, Odysseus, the King of Ithaca, leaves his family to participate in the Trojan Wars. In his absence, Odysseus appointed his trusted friend, Mentor, to provide guidance and tutelage to his son, Telemachus. Thus, the name of the individual entrusted to tutor the future king became associated with the practice of supporting and tutoring a young pupil. The term was subsequently adopted to denote a father figure who guides and supports the development of young people. As Ehrich et al. (2004) noted, “Throughout history, mentors have played a significant role in teaching, inducting, and developing the skills and talents of others” (p. 519) and this includes famous mentor-mentee relationships, such as Socrates and Plato, Plato and Aristotle, Freud and Jung, and Margaret Thatcher and John Major (Smith, 2017).

Despite its extensive lineage, mentoring is a concept that has only gained traction at an institutional level and in the literature over the past 50 years. At the beginning of the 1980s, mentoring was first introduced as a formal program of human resource development and retention in government organizations and corporations (Ehrich et al., 2004). Around that same time, mentoring was adopted in education as a means of reforming both pre-service and in-service teacher education (Wang & Odell, 2002). Mentoring was viewed as having the potential to redefine the induction process into a new profession; therefore, it became the focus of extensive investigation in a variety of fields. Hence, Bozeman and Feeney (2008) estimated that over 500 articles were published about mentoring in the management and education literature during a 10-year period starting in the late 1980s.

There has been a plethora of definitions for mentoring postulated in the literature, but a common starting point is the influential work of Kathy Kram, one of the pre-eminent scholars on mentorship in the field of management. In reflecting upon the evolution of mentoring over the past quarter century in the *Handbook of Mentoring at Work*, Ragins and Kram (2007) noted, “Traditionally, mentoring has been defined as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the

protégé's career" (p. 5). A key aspect of this definition that sets mentoring apart from other types of relationships is that it is a developmental relationship grounded in a particular professional context. Therefore, mentoring is an intentional, social engagement between individuals with goals associated with professional development.

Another aspect of mentoring highlighted in the definition is the level of experience of the members in the mentoring relationship. The mentorship literature generally portrays the relationship as being comprised of a more senior, experienced member working with a more junior member in the early stages of their career (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008; Brondyk & Searby, 2013; Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Smith, 2017). The differing levels of experience of the members of the mentoring relationship create a more unidirectional impact, inevitably manifesting in a power imbalance. Ambrosetti et al. (2014) noted that "existing definitions of mentoring tend to suggest a hierarchical relationship where the mentor is more experienced than the mentee, or that the mentor has or can provide knowledge and skills that the mentee wants or needs" (p. 225). In this way, the mentee is portrayed as a protégé whose primary responsibility is to absorb the wisdom of the mentor. This type of mentorship would best be described as a form of situated apprenticeship (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Trevethan, 2017) where the primary role of the mentor is to model practices the mentee would replicate and to guide them toward achieving similar levels of competence. In this way, the mentee is reduced to a recipient of professional knowledge, while the mentor is limited to the role described by Timperley (2013) as the 'routine expert.' Hobson and Malderez (2013) noted that this form of mentorship has been grounded in a managerial imperative to ensure quality control among new entrants into a profession.

While steeped in a long tradition that has garnered significant success, the apprenticeship model of mentorship also has several limitations. This model of mentoring can be effective in acculturating new members to the culture of the institution and/or profession. The approach can also be useful in developing foundational dispositions, knowledge, and skills to assist in becoming competent members in a particular field or organization. Nonetheless, it can be very limiting because it ignores the knowledge base of the mentee and restricts their development to those skills modelled by the mentor. As Hellsten et al. (2009) noted, "the apprenticeship model ... fails to recognize the existing expertise of the protégé, encourages deference to a mentor regardless of a mentor's expertise, encourages conformation to existing practices, and prohibits the development of new approaches to teaching and learning" (p. 707). The deficiencies of the approach are particularly relevant in complex fields, such as education, where mentees face ongoing, unique challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through the modelled guidance of the mentor. To promote ongoing growth within complex systems, an alternative form of mentoring is needed that moves beyond the mimicry and narrow guidance associated with apprenticeships. Hence, mentoring literature has advocated for moving beyond hierarchical relationships as the basis for mentorship.

15.3 Contemporary Understandings of Mentorship

A more contemporary view of mentoring postulates it as a reciprocal relationship. This does not mean that a power imbalance does not exist, but rather that power dynamics are addressed in such a manner as to promote a more collaborative, supportive relationship. Ambrosetti et al. (2014) wrote, “mentoring relationships are more commonly both reciprocal and asymmetrical, meaning that there are shared responsibilities between the participants, but one participant may be more experienced and take the lead within the relationship” (p. 225). Having shared responsibility means the mentee plays a more agentive role in setting goals, identifying areas for exploration, and challenging ideas. It also repositions the mentor and mentee as co-investigators of professional practice, thus recognizing the importance of mutual learning in the mentoring relationship. This is important not only from a learning standpoint but also from a motivational perspective because the reciprocity of mentoring outcomes results in a greater sense of accomplishment on the part of the mentor and heightened investment in the mentoring relationship (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008; Daresh, 2004; Izadinia, 2016).

An important aspect of a reciprocal relationship is the establishment of trust. When mentees do not trust that their mentors are there to support them, they will be less likely to share their anxieties and struggles out of fear of being perceived or evaluated negatively (Cherian, 2007; Doan, 2013; Jones et al., 2018; Trevethan, 2017). This would undermine the ability of the mentor to address the needs of the mentee and, inevitably, inhibit the professional growth of the mentee. The absence of a trusting, reciprocal relationship can also undermine the ability of the mentee to engage critically in workplace learning. Hudson (2016) noted that in the absence of a trusting relationship, mentees will be apprehensive to question practices adopted in a school. Thus, they would be left to explore the meaning of critical questions on their own or be forced to abandon them in favour of a more acculturative stance. In contrast, developing a trusting, reciprocal relationship contributes to an increased willingness on the part of mentees to engage critically with mentors and facilitates greater risk-taking (Castanheira, 2015; Izadinia, 2016; Bentley et al., 2017). Smith (2017) summarized the reciprocal character of mentoring well when he wrote, “A mentor is a sounding board and guide. Mentors provide perspectives [and] resources and ask thought-provoking questions. In the ideal mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees learn and teach each other” (p. 43).

One form of mentorship that promotes reciprocity is what Feiman-Nemser (1998) labelled “educative mentoring.” According to the author, educative mentoring promotes long-term professional development in a constructivist manner that begins with mentees’ concerns, questions, and goals and builds on them through an inquisitive stance. In this way, mentors do not just model teaching practices but “cultivate skills and habits that enable novices to learn in and from their practice. They use their knowledge and expertise to assess the direction novices are heading and to create opportunities and conditions that support meaningful teacher learning”

(Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 18). Thus, a more collegial relationship is established between mentors and mentees grounded in support and co-investigation.

One of the earliest manifestations of educative mentorship within education was the Laboratory Model of teacher education postulated by John Dewey (Graham, 2006). Within this model, the classroom was envisioned as a lab in which novice educators could not only become familiar with the work of teachers but also personalize and transform it. Rather than mimicking the practices of the more experienced mentor, novice educators were encouraged to critically engage with pedagogy in the classroom to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the work of educators. This required an alternative understanding of mentorship in which the mentee was “guided into habits of observation, interpretation, analysis, and reflection by their [mentors]” (Graham, 2006, p. 1119).

A more contemporary version of educative mentoring is the critical constructivist or critical interventionist approach. Grounded in critical theory and constructivism, the approach views the mentoring relationship as one grounded in critique and the co-construction of professional knowledge (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003; Richter et al., 2013; Wang & Odell, 2007). Within this approach, mentoring is characterized as “a joint effort between mentors and student teachers to examine pedagogical knowledge, share ideas and generate new professional knowledge” (Aderibigbe et al., 2018, p. 57). Through the process of engaging in critical reflection, the mentor and mentee deconstruct the meaning of pedagogical episodes and collaboratively establish new ways of looking at their teaching practices. In this context, mentorship is redefined as a transformative act (Brondyk & Searby, 2013). The approach’s benefits included showing “higher levels of efficacy, teaching enthusiasm, and job satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion after 1 year of training compared to teachers without constructivist mentoring” (Richter et al., 2013, p. 174).

Mentorship has been shown to support development in a few key areas. In her early work, Kram (1983) identified two key mentoring functions – career functions and psychosocial functions. Kram (1983) defined career functions as “those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance career advancement” (p. 614). This included such activities as coaching, sponsorship, exposure and visibility. Conversely, psychosocial functions were defined as those activities that enhance a sense of competence and support identity development. Examples of support in this area include role modelling and counselling. The emphasis on the two areas highlights that mentoring is not strictly pragmatic and directed towards enhancing performance but is also dedicated to addressing the general well-being of mentees. Thus, mentoring is focused on long-term development and not just short-term demonstration of competence.

The literature also outlines the timeline of mentoring relationships. In general, research supports the importance of time in fostering productive mentorship. Bentley et al. (2017) outlined how extended-field experiences facilitated greater connection between mentors and mentees, resulting in professional relationships evolving over time. They noted that this allowed for greater comfort, allowing mentors to “become co-teachers with their teacher candidates” (Bentley et al., 2017, p. 230). The benefit of an extended mentoring process is logical based on the

complexity of the relationship and the various phases through which it evolves. Ambrosetti et al. (2014) noted that the pre-mentoring phase explicitly targets the fundamentals of a formal relationship such as expectations, goals, roles, and communicative processes. This phase is essential for providing the foundations for the relationship, which can contribute to facilitating what Searby (2014) labelled a “mentoring mindset” to ensure mentorship is optimally productive. After initial contact, when mentoring roles, structures, etc., are determined, in the early stages of mentorship, mentees often seek guidance in the form of a visionary example on which to model themselves (Lehman, 2017). As time progresses, though, mentees assume greater autonomy and take a more active role in their professional development, grounded in the scaffolded ability to identify strengths and weaknesses and find resources to support continued growth. In a truly successful mentoring partnership, the role as mentor and mentee should dissipate, being replaced by a relationship as colleagues. Long (1997) cautioned that mentoring relationships that last too long can have a detrimental effect, as they are often fueled by co-dependency.

15.4 Mentoring Roles

Another key distinction in the literature is the level of formality of the mentoring relationship. On one end of the spectrum, formal mentoring involves institutionally mandated and structured mentoring processes. This form of mentoring is required as part of the induction process in particular organizations, therefore causing it to be labelled as “contrived” or “inauthentic” (Daresh, 2004). The success of formal mentoring relationships is highly dependent on institutional structures, particularly those related to training mentors and establishing mentor-mentee pairings that would promote effective interaction (Castanheira, 2015; Ehrich et al., 2004; Taylor & Black, 2018). For example, in the field of education, incongruent teaching philosophies and approaches can cause tensions between mentees and mentors. Trevethan (2017) wrote, “Conflicting views about the purpose of the practicum and about how to learn to teach are core issues that impact on student teachers, causing stress and compromising their learning” (p. 227). Therefore, it is essential for schools to have mechanisms in place to ensure mentors are selected based on a variety of criteria, including compatibility with the mentee.

At the other end of the spectrum, informal mentoring involves the self-identification and self-initiation of a mentoring partnership. It is thus more authentic because it is grounded in intrinsic motivation and the belief that the relationship can be mutually beneficial. Although it can involve formalized observations and feedback, it is generally more organic and based on the needs of the mentor and mentee. This results in informal mentoring often involving conversations in the hallway or the staff room based on identified goals rather than predetermined criteria (Jones et al., 2018). This not only results in enhancing the relevance of discussions but minimizes the likelihood that mentor interactions would devolve into what Hobson and Malderez (2013) labelled ‘judgmentoring.’ As a result, research has found that informal mentoring tends to be preferred by new personnel (Parylo et al., 2012).

Despite the general preference for informal mentoring, a lack of structure and accountability can lead to mentorship prematurely dissolving or not achieving its desired goals. As a result, scholars have advocated for a ‘light touch’ in mentoring that promotes flexibility through the formality of the mentoring process (Jones & Smith, 2022). This would ensure agency is maintained for mentors and mentees by providing choice in the assignment of mentoring relationships and the process undertaken while also experiencing the benefits associated with the guidance provided by institutional structures. This hybrid approach to mentoring was advocated by Parylo et al. (2012), who found that principals benefitted from both forms of mentoring in their study.

15.5 Mentoring in Teacher Education

There is great variance in the structure of teacher-education programs; however, a commonality between all programs is that they include some combination of coursework and field experience. Coursework generally involves one instructor engaging with a number of students, ranging from a small seminar class to a large lecture-based course. As a result, course instructors would not typically be considered mentors because they are not intimately involved in the professional development of student teachers but rather are focused on facilitating the exploration of course content. In contrast, during practica experiences, most education programs match a student teacher to a school-based teacher educator in the field and assign a university-based teacher educator who, together, support the student teachers’ development during field experiences.

In conducting a review of the labels and titles used in practica across Canadian institutions, it is clear there is great variance. School-based teacher educators in the field have been labelled variably as “cooperating teacher”, “mentor teacher”, “partner teacher”, “sponsor teacher”, “school associate”, “school advisor”, “teacher host”, and “community mentor.” Similarly, university-based teacher educators have been identified at different institutions as “university facilitator,” “faculty supervisor,” “field experience instructor,” “faculty mentor,” “faculty advisor,” “faculty representative,” “university liaison,” “university consultant,” and “practicum facilitator.” While there are commonalities between the different titles, the differences are significant in connoting the focus of the role. For example, the term ‘supervisor’ is derived from the Medieval Latin word *supervidue*, meaning to “look over or oversee” (Slick, 1998). This insinuates a hierarchical relationship where the university-based teacher educator is responsible for ensuring the quality of the performance of the student teacher. Conversely, the term ‘facilitator’ comes from the French verb *faciliter*, meaning “to render easy” (Online Etymology Dictionary, ND). This indicates a less hierarchical, more supportive role in which the university-based teacher educator assists the student teacher by providing guidance. This is significant in that it demonstrates the slightly different priorities of programs, but also in that it demonstrates how different roles are required by teacher educators throughout practical field experiences.

One role that is inevitably assumed by both the school-based teacher educator and the university-based teacher educator is that of an evaluator ensuring program standards have been met and requisite competencies demonstrated. Some scholars believe the adoption of an evaluative role undermines the ability of teacher educators to engage in the mentoring process. For example, Ng (2012) noted tensions between the adoption of developmental and appraisal roles. The author wrote, "There is a tension reconciling the two ... From a learning angle, [mentoring] emphasizes formative assessment (assessment for learning) but appraisal emphasizes summative assessment (assessment on learning) and both are often in conflict with each other" (Ng, 2012, p. 31). Hobson and Malderez (2013) concurred, arguing that a culture that emphasizes performativity, surveillance, and evaluation limits opportunities for the development of collegial learning environments that are characteristic of mentoring relationships. Similarly, Hudson (2016) articulated that assuming the "dual role as confidant and assessor to the mentee can be a catalyst for further relationship tensions" (p. 32). This may be because acting as a gatekeeper leads to increased incidence of judgmenting and the use of feedback techniques that undermine the efficacy of the mentoring relationship.

While skepticism exists over the ability of teacher educators to engage in assessment and mentoring concurrently, they can be conceptualized as complementary roles typically assumed by mentors. Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) observed that adopting an evaluative role assisted with the mentoring process. They noted that mentors who assessed student progress were better able to support professional development because their guidance was accepted based on their role. In contrast, the authors highlighted that mentors without summative assessment responsibilities had to "rely on their personal skills and influence to get their concerns on the table" (Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, 2008, p. 948). Thus, the ability to assess performance resulted in mentoring guidance being more readily accepted. In a similar way, Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) found that teacher educators who did not have evaluative responsibilities were less likely to provide direct feedback to students, thus, undermining their ability to guide professional development.

The notion that evaluation undermines mentorship is premised on the assumption that the roles are mutually exclusive and contradictory. If this were true, the work of school-based teacher educators would be impossible because they are entrusted with the dual responsibility of establishing meaningful relationships with students to ensure the curriculum-as-lived experience meets their needs (Aoki, 2005) and assessing growth and performance. As noted by Hobson and Malderez (2013), assessing performance does not preclude the establishment of a caring, supportive relationship. Moreover, feedback, which is inevitable in a mentor-mentee relationship, is a form of assistance and assessment. What is considered evaluative could also be construed as supportive because it provides insight into areas for continued growth. Due to the complexity of their work, educators constantly shift roles based on the context. Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) clarified, "First they advertise their gate-keeping functions and communicate high expectations, then they position themselves as student allies, working to help them prepare for assessments and succeed in their learning" (p. 944). As such, they must navigate what Elbow (1986) calls "a paradoxical coherence" to embrace the contraries of assessment and assistance to ensure they satisfy their diverse responsibilities.

In this chapter, we conceptualize mentoring as a complex, multi-dimensional undertaking that requires ongoing reflection and professional decision-making to ensure it achieves its goal of promoting professional growth. While we recognize the preference for mentoring as an “offline” activity where evaluations are not required (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), we view the work of school-based teacher educators and university-based teacher educators as being a form of mentorship even when attached to a supervisory role. This is because mentors make ongoing decisions to promote interactions with mentees that engage the zone of pedagogical construction (Graham, 2006). Entering this zone requires that teacher educators consider a number of variables, including students’ perception of and response to the approaches adopted, to ensure optimal learning and growth are taking place. Therefore, mentoring inherently involves praxis grounded in context to make appropriate developmental decisions. The Mentorship Dimensions that will be introduced in the following section provide a framework for guiding reflection on mentoring practices.

15.6 Mentorship in Practice

The Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge has a long history of faculty involvement in the field, with ‘field supervision’ being a workload requirement for all members of the faculty. We teach courses on campus and advise student teachers in the field in various K-12 classroom contexts across the province. Due to the active involvement of faculty members as practica advisors, the program highlights this as a strength and cornerstone of the student experience. As university advisors driving from school to school, week after week, we started to wonder if we were on the right track in terms of how we were supporting student teachers in their practica. One day, after a faculty-wide meeting that emphasized the strength of our program was partly due to faculty members’ involvement in the field, we started to question how we could substantiate these claims. What evidence did we have to make these statements? What were other advisors doing in the field when they visited their student teachers? What did students think of how they were being supported? Grounded in a curiosity about practices of mentoring in practica, we begin a research project that aims to learn from both student teachers and their university advisors about their dynamics during field placements.

What began as a small project turned into a 7-year program of research including five phases of qualitative data collection with over 70 student teachers and 45 university advisors. Each phase of this research explored slightly different research questions with slightly different qualitative methods, but the overarching aim has been to dive deeply into what constitutes quality mentorship practices. We have gathered reflective writing journals, conducted individual interviews, and facilitated small focus group discussions with both student teachers and their university advisors. Additionally, we gathered visual artifacts from university advisors about the evolution of their own practice. What we learned very quickly from the advisors was that their work in the field is an extension of their teaching practice, a practice that requires ongoing reflection, growth, development, and adjustments for

contextual factors and student needs, just like in courses on campus. However, there were very few practical tools or strategies that could support an ongoing-reflective practice for mentors. We made it our aim to translate what we had learned into a tool that could be used in practice with advisors and their student teachers in the field.

As we engaged in ongoing familiarization through qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), we produced several codes that constituted subthemes. For example, ‘guide’ was a subtheme that included codes such as supportive, caring, and coaching, whereas the subtheme ‘gatekeeper’ included codes such as evaluator, assessor, and judgement. We then came to understand that the guide and gatekeeper subthemes were both related to the role of the mentor. Thus, the first dimension was produced, and we called it role. Through active code and theme production, we generated six themes, which have been operationalized as the Mentorship Dimensions.

15.7 The Mentorship Dimensions

In the spirit of Feiman-Nemser’s (1998) “educative mentoring,” we have created a tool that harnesses an inquisitive stance and aims to promote long-term professional development by fostering a collegial relationship with mentors and mentees. The Mentorship Dimensions tool includes six dimensions, split between two foci: dynamic, perspective, and role are dimensions related to the mentor’s disposition and focus, and approach and debrief are dimensions related to the feedback process. Each dimension can be utilized individually, but the combination of several dimensions most often reflects the nuanced dynamic of mentorship in the field. We call these dimensions because they are intended to represent depth and breadth in a nonlinear fashion. Each dimension exists on a continuum, and to operationalize the dimensions, we name and define the extreme ends of each. It is important to note that although there is a visual distinction from one end of a dimension to the other, it is not intended to be perceived as a binary, nor is there a right end and wrong end of the continuum. Rather, the continuum encourages movement, sliding between different positions as a way of responding to and tailoring approaches based on individual contextual factors and student needs. In fact, it is our position that the movement within the dimensions is necessary to be truly responsive to the mentee and the context. Although there is no right or wrong in the case of these dimensions, immovability is indicative of a static approach to supervision that often will not reflect the realities of the classroom nor meet the individualized needs of mentees.

The Mentorship Dimensions are a reflective tool, and with any tool, there are limitations. We caution safe use of this tool as one of many approaches to support student teachers. Its intended use is not singular, and not all contextual variables, situations, or dynamics will be accounted for. So, we invite you to use this tool to guide reflection on your experience to identify optimal approaches to foster professional growth. In realizing the broad applicability of the Mentorship Dimensions within and beyond the field of education, we use the terms mentor and mentee. In the field of education, the mentor may be the school-based or university-based

teacher educator, or the school leader, and the mentee is the student teacher, but in other mentorship contexts, the terms mentor and mentee apply more generically.

The disposition of the mentor emphasizes the value of relationships, trust, and a mutual interest in professional growth within the mentor/mentee dynamic. The first three dimensions, Dynamic (Fig. 15.1), Perspective (Fig. 15.2) and Role (Fig. 15.3), are centralized around the disposition of the mentor and highlight power relations, the relationship between theory and practice, and the objectives of the mentor.

The Dynamic dimension addresses how relational power is situated between the mentor and the mentee. On one end of the continuum is a hierarchical dynamic where the mentor utilizes their power to maintain a formal, pragmatic connection with the mentee. The power distance based on status between the mentor and mentee is reinforced. Conversely, the relational dynamic is where relationship building is emphasized to form collegial, authentic connections to help mentees feel comfortable and minimize the power difference between the mentor and the mentee.

The Perspective dimension primarily attends to the relationship between theory and practice. On one end of the continuum is the isolation perspective, which focuses exclusively on the classroom and prioritizes real-world experiences over theory and coursework. Conversely, the integration perspective focuses on both theory and practice and brings together coursework and practicum experiences with the aim of overall professional development.

The Role dimension highlights how the mentor views their primary objectives. On one end of the continuum is the guide role. A guide is focused on supporting growth and mentorship, facilitating and developing a collaborative and collegial dynamic. Conversely, a gatekeeper role is exclusively directed toward assessment and assumes an evaluative role, upholding standardized measures of success.

The feedback process is incredibly valuable and is a prime opportunity to work with mentees to develop a strong reflective practice. As such, the final three dimensions, Focus (Fig. 15.4), Approach (Fig. 15.5), and Debrief (Fig. 15.6) are most aligned with the feedback process and feature the level of detail, the balance of identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and the style of communication between the mentor and the mentee.

Fig. 15.1 Dimension 1:
Dynamic



Fig. 15.2 Dimension 2:
Perspective



Fig. 15.3 Dimension
3: Role



Fig. 15.4 Dimension 4:
Focus



Fig. 15.5 Dimension 5:
Approach



Fig. 15.6 Dimension 6:
Debrief



The Focus dimension accounts for scope and specificity in the feedback process. It provides a scope to zoom in on the details of the context or step back and away for a more holistic view. The contextual focus emphasizes performance in a specific setting with a focus on tips and strategies related to improvements in a particular context at a specific moment in time. Alternatively, the holistic focus emphasizes the big picture in professional growth, including the evolution of one's pedagogical philosophy and applications to different contexts as a student teacher becomes an educator.

The Approach dimension is related to the intention behind feedback. A constructive approach includes a balance of positive comments and constructive criticism focused on fostering growth and reflection. In addition, a constructive approach places emphasis on identifying a plan and strategies for the mentee to move forward with, to ensure the feedback empowers their practice. Whereas a critical approach exclusively focusses on remediation and fixing mistakes with little or no identification of strengths and often does not include a formalized path forward for the mentee.

The Debrief dimension is directly related to the interaction that often takes place when a mentor and mentee meet for an intentional and deliberate interaction. Dialogic feedback includes a two-way conversation and questioning in which both the mentor and mentee initiate and listen. There is a natural flow to the conversation and there is not necessarily a predetermined outcome. Alternatively, monologic feedback typically involves the mentor as the sole initiator of and primary discussant and positions the mentee as a passive listener.

Together, the Mentorship Dimensions are a tool to support quality mentorship practices. But you might wonder how they apply, in what types of scenarios they would be useful, and how they could support the development of mentorship practices. The following section provides case examples drawn from our data that have been developed into narrative vignettes to exemplify how the Mentorship Dimensions can work.

15.8 Using the Mentorship Dimensions

These narrative vignettes use composite characters and direct participant voice to enact real-life scenarios. They demonstrate how the Mentorship Dimensions can be used and the power they hold to reshape the mentorship experience for both mentors and mentees. We pose some critical questions along with each vignette and invite you to practice using the Mentorship Dimensions (Fig. 15.7).

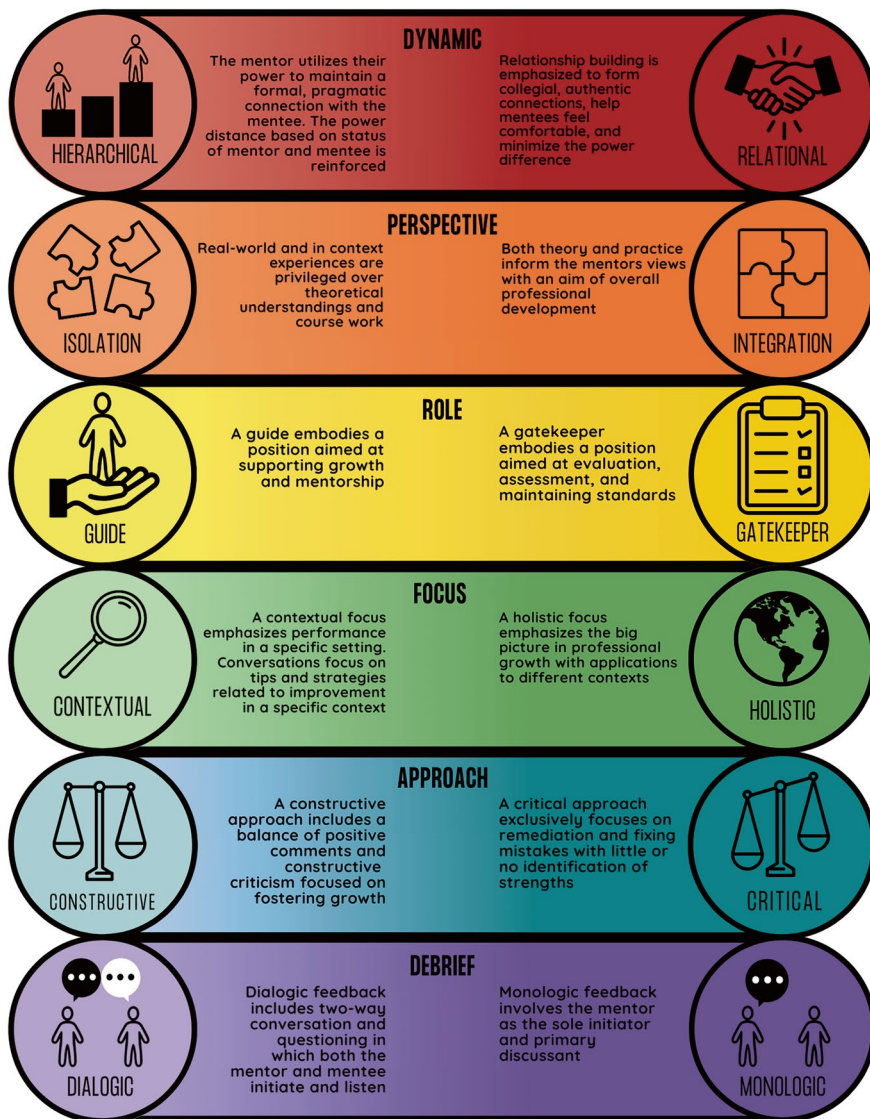


Fig. 15.7 Mentorship dimensions

Vignette #1: Relationships Matter

Carol just received the list of student teachers that she will be working with as a university advisor during practicum. Since she did not know all her students prior to practicum, she decided to send them all an email to introduce herself. Carol sent the student teachers an email clearly outlining practicum expectations and told them that she would be in touch later to schedule observations.

Carol had six students at various locations in southern Alberta. She ensured that she made weekly visits to each of them throughout the practicum. Having six students kept her very busy, as she also had other responsibilities at the university that were a priority for her. She made sure, however, that there were 10 min after each school visit for a debrief, and student teachers could also contact her via email.

One of her student teachers confided, “I understand that she had a whole bunch of schools she was visiting and whole bunch of students, but I do wish there was a little bit more time for us to get to know each other. It was just a check-in, *basically. She came in, advised, and then left. There was never a point for extra communication or asking for help or support.*”

Even though Carol’s visits were always pleasant enough, the students could tell they weren’t her top priority. It felt like advising was just another job to Carol, and it didn’t feel like Carol cared about them.

While Carol felt she was trying to be supportive of student teachers and asked them how they were doing, she noted that “*a lot of the students perceived me as an adversarial presence in the room, which was unfortunate. They kind of saw me as someone who’s coming in there to evaluate and sort of ruin the party.*”

Another student teacher noted that “*she asked questions about how the school was, but I doubt she would have helped much if there was anything wrong. We didn’t really get to know each other all that well. I mean, she gave a small briefing to all the students that were in her observation section before we started the practicum. But other than that, I didn’t know a whole lot about her background.*”

In this vignette, several of the dimensions apply, but as an example, we can highlight the Dynamic dimension. In this case, it appears that Carol is situated in a more hierarchical dynamic because students see her as adversarial and evaluative. However, one of Carol’s student teachers indicated that they want more time, more communication, and to get to know Carol more. Clearly there is dissonance in this case between Carol and her student’s desired dynamic.

As Carol reflects using the Dynamic dimension, she can clearly articulate her position on the continuum when she identifies the student’s perception that she has an adversarial presence. This is not to say that Carol will entirely shift the dynamic or remain static. There are personal styles and individual circumstances to consider, but using the Dynamic dimension to suss out possible tensions and make the power

dynamic more transparent is an important reflective opportunity for both Carol and her student teachers.

The student's comment about communication is important to note, particularly in combination with Carol's comment about her full schedule and various other commitments. The Debrief dimension could serve as a useful point of reflection for Carol. Perhaps engaging with a dialogic approach more often would ease student concerns about communication and create an opportunity for students to pose questions, voice concerns, or ask for advice. Additionally, a dialogic approach may rebalance the power dynamics at play and minimize the perception of students that Carol is in an adversarial position.

- How would you describe the relationship between Carol and the student teachers?
- Why might the students feel that Carol was an 'adversarial presence in the room'?
- How might a lack of relationship affect the practicum experience for a student teacher?
- What could Carol have done differently to help convey to student teachers that she is there to support them?

Vignette #2: Coach in the Corner

After 20 min of angry cleaning her kitchen, she was thinking clearly enough to text her university advisor. Mariko had made it clear from the beginning that she wanted her student teachers to see her as a coach, a cheerleader, somebody they could trust, somebody they could spill their guts to, and someone they could go to for help.

Elle, a student teacher, frustrated by the lack of feedback from her assigned mentor teacher slammed the door to her apartment, dropped her teaching bag, and burst into tears. Her assigned teacher barely paid attention to her. *"If I'm doing a terrible job, just tell me,"* she said to her empty apartment. *"Don't just muse about it all by yourself!"*

"Terrible day," Elle texted. *"I feel like my teacher thinks I'm an idiot, but he doesn't give me any feedback at all. Suggestions?"* After a few texts back and forth, Mariko texted: *"Would you like to meet sometime tomorrow?"*

In a booth at Tim Horton's, Mariko calmly stirred honey into her tea while Elle vented. *"I just don't know if I'm doing a good job or not,"* Elle said. *"My teacher doesn't give me any feedback at all. It's like he's just going through the motions but doesn't care about my teaching at all. If I'm that bad, at least tell me how to improve."*

Mariko primly set down her tea and cautioned Elle about being professional. *"We're not going to have a conversation saying that he is not doing what he is supposed to be doing, in terms of making a bad judgement. We're just saying, 'This is what's not happening.' So how can we work together to make it happen?"*

"I actually started writing a letter to him, like an email just saying these are the things I need you to help me with." *"Do you have it with you?"* Mariko

asked. Elle pulled out her laptop and showed Mariko, using her as a sounding board as they made edits together.

“Take a deep breath,” Mariko encouraged her, *“and just think about it for a moment—not from an emotional or exhausted point of view. Just take a break and step back and get a clear picture of things.”* The tea was finished and the coffee cold before the email was ready to send.

In this vignette, Mariko demonstrates a strong Guide role in the majority of her interactions with Elle. She coaches, redirects, mentors, and directly supports Elle’s growth. However, by doing so, she is also maintaining standards of professional conduct with Elle and mentoring Elle to do the same in her interactions with her teacher. She slides across the dimension as a strong Guide but also at times as a Gatekeeper when she strongly redirects Elle in an effort to maintain professional standards related to conduct and communication.

Additionally, Mariko is drawing on the Focus dimension by utilizing the specific context of Elle’s teaching to emphasize skills for holistic professional growth, such as working collaboratively and seeking perspective in trying times. In this case, Mariko’s focus is both contextual and holistic, demonstrating how both ends of the dimension can work simultaneously for growth. In this case, Mariko demonstrates continuous movement along both the Role and Focus dimensions at different points of the same interaction with Elle.

- What other considerations do you think informed Mariko’s approach with Elle?
- How else could Mariko have responded to Elle’s comments, which could be considered unprofessional, about her teacher?
- Can you identify other points of interaction where Mariko shows movement along the continuum?

Vignette #3: Feedback Fumbles

Julie just finished teaching a lesson and is now getting ready for a debrief session with her university advisor, Mike.

During the debrief, Mike tries to adopt a sandwich method of telling Julie what she has done well and what her goals should be moving forward. He explains his approach, *“I can be really clear about, ‘do this better, do that better.’ Or not necessarily do it better but, you know this is what I saw and have you thought about trying it this way?’, kind of thing. So, at the very end it is like, look I think that your lesson was effective in at least two or three ways that I’ve listed earlier and you know here is your goal moving forward.’ And then finally the last thing is that ‘this is what I want to see next time. I want to see you...’ fill in the blank, whatever it is.”*

While Mike does incorporate both positive and negative feedback, some of his students do not always receive his feedback in the same way that it is intended. Julie commented: *“I understand that what he said is just something*

to consider; it is a new perspective that could help me become a better teacher, but I also felt a little attacked. There were few positives when he gave me his review, he never told me the lesson was crap, but I felt that that is how he saw it."

Another student, Ally, confided, *"I felt like anything that Mike would comment on I would never get a 'this is what you could do differently. This is what would have maybe helped you.' It was more just like, 'you did this wrong.' And I felt, overall, in anything that he commented on I could have used feedback that would help me improve on it, not just you did this."* Looking ahead to the next observation, the student said, *"I do hope that when I get feedback it is not all negative like last time."*

While some students expressed concern over Mike's approach to providing feedback, he was also frustrated by the lack of openness by some students receiving feedback. He thinks student teachers, almost across the board, could improve their experience by recognizing that their mentors are there to support them. He laments, *"We want to see them succeed, and a part of success is learning how to take feedback in non-defensive ways, to trust the relationship that is there and not suspect that every suggestion is a sign of our thinking they aren't fit for the profession."*

For the next round of observations, once again, Mike focused on providing balanced constructive feedback and not just sugarcoating things. He articulated, *"When I spoke to the student teacher, I was able to say, 'look, your questions are crap'... obviously not in those words... but we're saying fix these things. But I think that's what I'm there for is to give them feedback, so if they're going to start getting defensive about any kind of negative feedback then it's almost like, 'what am I there for?'"*

Again, Mike's goal of helping his students grow has not been perceived the same way by the students. Ally explained, *"I felt like my reasoning and opinions didn't matter to Mike. He made me feel as though I was not doing anything right."*

Upon reflection, Mike wonders what more he could do to help his students. *"I had a couple this past semester that it was hard for them to take feedback, and I really had to kind of think about how I was going to change my way of approaching it because I know that what I was doing wasn't really working with those particular students. They became very defensive."* He continued, *"I wonder if we're doing enough to teach professionals how to receive feedback."*

In this vignette, Mike concludes by posing a critical question that acknowledges that feedback has both a giver and a receiver and highlights the tensions he experiences with student defensiveness. The Approach dimension represents a classic difference between critical and constructive feedback. In this case, both Mike and his students are not satisfied with the approach to feedback, with Mike feeling like his feedback is geared toward the constructive and aimed at improving practice, whereas his students feel the feedback is overwhelmingly critical.

When Mike's student Ally says, "I feel like my reasoning and opinions don't matter," the Perspective dimension is highlighted. Ally identifies a desire to contextualize specific, isolated variables in her classroom, whereas Mike emphasizes more integrated understandings related to concepts like questioning. Ally and Mike appear to be on opposite ends of the dimension.

- How might Mike reframe his feedback to be received more constructively by students?
- In what ways could the Approach and Perspective dimensions be utilized to situate feedback and mediate student defensiveness?

We have shown through these vignettes how the Mentorship Dimensions can be applied in various case scenarios to reflect and extend mentorship approaches. Additionally, the Mentorship Dimensions can also be used to self-assess mentorship practices prior to, during, and after mentoring. In terms of early engagement with student teachers, the Mentorship Dimensions can be used in consultation with student teachers to diagnostically explore what student teachers need/want and initiate dialogue regarding what they and their mentors expect. The intention is that the Mentorship Dimensions can be used to activate a reflective and evolving stance for both the mentor and the mentee.

15.9 Conclusion

It is overwhelmingly clear that the role of practica in teacher education is incredibly important for the growth and development of student teachers and is well-situated in a strong body of literature on mentorship. However, few tools for mentoring through reflection have been developed for use in teacher education. As a result, our aim was to create a reflective tool to support the work of mentors and mentees in the field. This chapter demonstrates practical and applicable ways to strengthen mentorship by promoting reflective practice within field-based teacher education by presenting a reflective tool alongside real-world case examples.

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