October 2022

Nurturing Mentorship Relationships Through Inquiry-Based Dialogue

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Apprenticeship is a popular strategy employed by applied learning programs and experiences. Like many other professional training programs, preservice teacher training traditionally employs apprenticeship as a means of facilitating professional learning among teacher candidates. Such apprenticeship typically involves mentorship of a preservice teacher by an established and practicing teacher. Meanwhile, teacher education often tends to assume that those who teach also know how to mentor (Ambrosetti, Knight & Dekkers, 2014) and a mentorship relationship will develop between the preservice and the inservice teacher. Although there is acknowledgement in the literature that mentorship "is both a relationship and a process" (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005, p. 276), there is a dearth of knowledge about what allows for the development of positive and productive relationships between mentees and mentors (Fairbanks, Freedman & Kahn, 2000) while engaged in applied learning. There is some indication that both formal (Hobson, 2012; Hobson, Ashby, Maldarez, Tomlinson, 2009; Izadinia, 2015) and informal (Du & Wang, 2017) mentoring processes are key to shaping new teachers' positive socialization into the workplace, yet little is known overall about how interpersonal interactions support the development of productive and engaged mentor-mentee relationships.

For the purpose of this essay, *mentorship* refers to "a holistic form of teaching and learning that embraces the professional, personal, psychosocial, and career facets of a [preservice teacher's] development" (Mullen, 2009, p. 12). Within this definition, we simultaneously acknowledge the mentor's ongoing learning process (Beck and Kosnik, 2000; Rekha & Ganesh, 2012). We argue that at the heart of developing positive mentorship relationships in applied learning programs is *inquiry-based dialogue*, which is an interpersonal approach to fostering critical reflective dialogue that is grounded in nurturing, thoughtful, inquisitive and non-hierarchical communication. This concept emerges from the literature on practitioner inquiry through employing Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) notion of an inquiry stance, wherein practitioners take a critical and reflective eye to examining and refining their professional practices within and beyond schools (see also Currin, 2019). We agree with Ballock (2019) that the goal of educator preparation is to build a culture of inquiry, and in this paper examine how inquiry-based dialogue can reinforce informal acts of relationship-building and communication between mentors and mentees in applied learning programs through providing space for critical reflection on practice.

The guiding question for this retrospective paper is: What potential does an inquiry-based dialogue practice hold for supporting relationship development among preservice teacher mentees and their mentor teachers? In so doing, this essay takes a look back at our relational experiences in a mentorship partnership

together, as we were formally paired by an urban public preservice teacher mentorship program over fifteen years ago. Through reflecting upon our previous experience together as mentor practicing teacher (Kathy) and mentee preservice teacher in training (Rhiannon), we highlight ways in which our engagement in an inquiry-based dialogue process supported our mentor-mentee learning relationship. In so doing, we contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of relationship in mentorship partnerships (Irby, Boswell, Kappler Hewitt, Lynch, Abdelrahman & Jeong, 2017; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010; Sassi & Thomas, 2012). We also build upon emerging research on the characteristics and qualities of effective mentorship (Cho, Ramanan & Feldman, 2011; Hall, Draper, Smith & Bullough, 2008; Grossman & Davis, 2012; Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006) with respect to becoming a teacher and learning to teach (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Britzman, 1991).

The reflective vignettes and brief dialogues relayed in this essay show how authentic mentor-mentee relationships can strengthen dialogue, promote critical reflection, and create openings for new levels of critical consciousness to emerge. This essay is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on inquiry-based dialogue and relationships. Second, we contextualize our mentor-mentee relationship by narrating how we initially came to work together, our individual reflections on this experience, and how we engaged practitioner inquiry and oral history approaches in our dialogues. Third, we focus on three critical insights about how we grew a reflective practice in our mentorship partnership. Finally, we end with some concluding thoughts about the significance of engaging in an inquiry-based dialogue process for developing quality mentor-mentee relationships in applied learning programs.

Theoretical Framework: Inquiry-Based Dialogue as Rooted in Relationship

The literature on mentorship in applied learning provides a useful framework for understanding the various roles that mentors must serve. Teacher education scholarship positions school-based one-on-one mentorship, when adequately implemented, as crucial for effective preservice teacher training (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Glenn, 2006; Izadinia, 2015). Mentoring is found to support multiple functions across technical, political and emotional domains. Mentors serve concurrent roles: in the technical domain, they model and train preservice teachers in effective modes of curriculum delivery; in the political domain, they protect, support and promote preservice teachers' work; and in the emotional domain, they listen, advise and encourage new teachers as they encounter and process obstacles and techniques for responding (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; for more on emotion and affect in mentoring, see Hawkey, 2006).

Grossman and Davis (2012) argue that effective mentorship requires a personalized approach, one that varies according to the knowledge and needs of the particular mentor-mentee pairing. They show that effective mentors tend to hold three features in common: mentors are highly trained, mentors hold high quality content knowledge, and there is sufficient time for mentorship. Further, they show that mentees who feel better prepared for teaching placements report more positive mentorship experiences, likely due to an ability to more clearly identify areas for improvement and seek support from their mentors. Grossman and Davis (2012) argue that fit matters a great deal in mentorship pairings, and encourage the thoughtful matching of mentors with mentees.

Mentorship is found to hold strong implications for supporting the positive professional identity development of new teachers. Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010) define professional teacher identity as "self-knowledge in teaching-related situations and relationships that manifest themselves in practical professional activities, feelings of belonging and learning experiences" (p. 1564). Teacher education programs have often been found to provide inadequate space for the intentional exploration of one's identity, despite identity development having been found to be a crucial component of teacher preparation and readiness for the classroom. Teacher preparation programs thus have an obligation to create space for such exploration of teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; see also Bullough, 2005), and mentors are crucial agents in supporting preservice teachers in their development of a positive professional teacher identity (Izadinia, 2015; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010).

From this literature, we can ascertain that mentorship is a vital component of preservice teacher education. However, what allows for the development of strong inquiry-based learning-oriented mentorship relationships? In answering this question, the work of Freire (2004; Freire & Shore, 1987) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) support our assertion that inquiry-based dialogue processes may be used as a means of supporting the learning relationship between mentors and mentees.

Freire asserted that learning should serve liberatory functions for oppressed or marginalized individuals and social groups. Here, the learner builds "consciousness *of* [sic] consciousness" (Freire, 2004, p. 79), meaning the learner becomes increasingly aware of their assumptions and established worldviews. Dialogue is fundamental to this problem-posing approach to learning. Freire articulates that learners must actively engage in knowledge-making "as Subjects, not as objects," and argued that "[Subjects] must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear" (Freire, 2004, p. 67). Learning relationships between students and their teachers are thought to be key for this active and intervention-oriented sense-making, and dialogue is positioned as central to the learning relationship. Freire and Shor (1987) define dialogue as

"the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study" (p. 100). Thus, dialogue may be understood as the relational "glue" between mentor and mentee.

In their exploration of practitioner inquiry as a means through which knowledge is constructed, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) build on Freire's (2004; Freire & Shor, 1987) work by centering dialogue as the primary mode through which professional knowledge is built. They argue that collaborative relationships between teachers are necessary for non-hierarchical knowledge-generation, and position interpersonal relationships between practitioners as key for supporting local knowledge development and its experimental application. Here, "teachers across the professional life span play a central and critical role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and schools sites for inquiry, connecting their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 273). Thus, inquiry is framed as the key for developing meaningful learning relationships and has the potential to inform the move toward enhanced critical awareness (Hussein, 2007) for both mentor and mentee.

When applied to mentorship relationships, we might take from Freire (2004) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) that mentorship holds significant potential when it allows for an inquiry-oriented approach to constructing knowledge of practice. As well, it involves processes of mentor and mentee engagement in dialogical and recursive conversation that identifies questions of salience to their practice, engages in intellectual inquiry into such questions, and strives to apply such knowledge to their practice in situated practical domains. In this sense, inquiry-based dialogue is relational, non-hierarchical, and inquiry-oriented. Inquiry-based dialogue supports the learning of both mentor and mentee, as they each engage with personal questions stemming from practice. Here, the mentor strives to support the mentee in a self-reflective professional identity development that centers critical social justice values and liberatory pedagogical approaches.

Productive liberatory dialogue requires that there is an element of care and trust between those who are in dialogue with one another. Noddings (2012) has written extensively about the role of a care ethic in teaching relationships. She argues that caring relationships require attentiveness from the carer (in this case the mentor) that is receptive to the expressed needs of the one being cared for (in this case the mentee). Here, the carer has the responsibility to understand and meet the care-based needs of the cared for, and the cared-for has a responsibility to show in some way that the care has been received (Noddings, 2012). Trust between mentor and mentee is crucial for supporting learning, and involves openness to vulnerability and the belief in the reliability and benevolence of the

other (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Together, an ethic of care and the establishment of trust between mentor and mentee can support the development of positive rapport which, as Sassi and Thomas (2012) point out, offers significant opportunity for supporting learning among both parties. Relationship is thus key for supporting an inquiry-based dialogue process of applied learning through mentorship.

The Story of Our Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Over fifteen years ago, we were assigned to work together through a school district-university partnership for secondary preservice teacher training in urban Canada. Kathy was the mentor, and was a full-time teacher at a neighborhood school in a large urban center. Rhiannon was the mentee, and was registered in a one-year B.Ed teacher training program at a local public university. Rhiannon was assigned to work as a "student teacher" under Kathy's guidance every school-day for a period of three weeks. Kathy voluntarily chose to participate, while Rhiannon participated in order to fulfill preservice teacher program requirements at her university. This was Rhiannon's first of three immersion placements in area schools. We were assigned to partner with each other based on an overlap in one teachable subject, but otherwise our assignment together as mentor-mentee was random. At first, Rhiannon primarily observed Kathy's professional practice, and over the course of the three weeks transitioned into fully teaching several of Kathy's classes.

After the mentorship assignment was formally complete, we have continued to maintain contact and meet up occasionally in person. We have also continued to communicate via email several times per year. This once formal mentor-mentee relationship slowly transitioned to an informal mentoring relationship at the end of the official school-based mentorship program, and our friendship has continued since then. We reflect upon our formal mentorship experience as a successful and empowering story of mentor-mentee relationship, and believe it optimistically highlights the significance of engaged mentorship relationships broadly.

> *Rhiannon reflects:* Leading into this first experience as a teacher in a public school classroom, my philosophical perspective on education was grounded in concern for the democratic functions of schooling in students' lives and society. I entered into our mentorship pairing having previously taught in a few American private schools, worked as a case-manager in a non-profit organization for kids experiencing homelessness, and engaged in anti-poverty and social justice activism and organizing. I was conscious of my identity and privilege as a white middle-class Canadian woman. At the time of meeting Kathy, I hoped to

later apply my learning in the teacher training program to working in a progressive alternative school that supported enhanced freedom and agency for students through the design of personalized learning programs, participation in school governance, and development of creative school structures (see Bascia & Maton, 2015; Maton & Nichols, 2017, 2020). During my weeks with Kathy, I found the traditional high school space to be simultaneously exciting, terrifying, joyful and unsettling. My dreams for progressive alternative education frequently conflicted with the school's daily routines and structures. As my mentor, I found that Kathy provided me with a sense of hope as I learned how to navigate the school space and my work as a teacher. She spent a great deal of time talking with me, brainstorming solutions to challenges that surfaced, and listening to my questions. Our ongoing dialogue enabled us to form a tight bond early in our mentor-mentee relationship.

Kathy reflects: Due to my own lived experiences to this point – as a first generation Canadian, an ethnic woman of working class background, and an artist-researcher and teacher – and due to the process of immersing myself in ongoing personal and professional learning, primarily through my graduate studies, I came into our mentorship relationship excited about teaching-learning with you, Rhiannon. At that point, my philosophical orientation to mentorship was informed primarily by feminist perspectives, adult learning principles, collaborative approaches and processes, and a holistic orientation to teaching and learning. I, like many mentor/associate teachers, did not receive any comprehensive preparation or support for my role as associate teacher. Nor did I receive any release time to fulfill my responsibilities as an associate teacher/mentor. I did, however, receive a manual published by the preservice teacher program outlining general mentorship guidelines. I had also acted as a mentor for preservice teachers since the early 1990's and had been engaging in self-directed ongoing personal and professional development through various workshops and courses offered by the school district and other teacher affiliated organizations. I had also recently completed my Ph.D. in Education.

Our Approach

In reflecting upon and making sense of our initial mentorship pairing, Rhiannon and Kathy seek to build better understanding of the role of inquiry-based dialogue in supporting our development of a strong and productive

mentorship relationship, which has continued for over fifteen years since our initial pairing.

We employ a combination of oral history (Sommer and Quinlan, 2014) and practitioner inquiry approaches (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in this reflection. We used oral history as a means of unearthing and locating our memories in the initial stages of our study. Oral history approaches center a personal and subjective reflection on past events, and frequently information is obtained through recorded conversations. It is common for oral history approaches to be used in combination with other primary information sources such as photographs, emails, or other materials generated at the time that is being reflected upon. Oral history is generally used as a means of generating new analysis through exploring memories, and thus can provide a deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of historical events (Sommer and Quinlan, 2014).

Later stages of our exploration were guided primarily by practitioner inquiry approaches. Practitioner inquiry positions teachers as central agents in research and professional knowledge generation. This process strives to draw attention to the ways in which we as teachers might co-construct knowledge in professional contexts, wherein we might identify meaningful and responsive ways in which to improve our professional practice in working with students, designing curriculum and pedagogy, or other professional skills. As teachers, a practitioner inquiry process supports us in seeing ourselves as agents of change who may draw on the knowledge that we and our colleagues hold in order to strengthen professional practice over time (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 2007; Campano, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

We engage practitioner inquiry through taking what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) call an "inquiry stance" orientation in reflecting upon our mentorship relationship. This means that we employ inquiry-based dialogue in order to reflect upon our practice, and we use critical approaches of questioning and reflection to examine the problems and specific incidences that were encountered during our mentor-mentee relationship. We believe that this approach allows us to build better and deeper knowledge of our own practice.

Our Process of Exploration

In our first phase of this exploration we located and discussed three primary sources of information. First, we had several conversations around five years ago where we reflected upon our initial mentor-mentee pairing together. These conversations were recorded and later transcribed. Second, we located photographs that were taken during the initial mentorship pairing. Third, we collected all existing emails that have been sent between us over the years since

our initial meeting. We looked carefully through all three sources of information and then generated a list of five key themes that we saw as significant to our use of inquiry-based dialogue while in the formal mentor-mentee pairing. Through ongoing inquiry-based dialogue, guided by practitioner inquiry approaches, we narrowed our themes of interest down to three overall themes, which compose the core structure of this paper.

This article is organized into three key themes, which were generated through critically contemplating and discussing the various information sources. We have identified key moments in our conversations that highlight the significance of such themes, and share these conversations as a means of probing more deeply into the meaning and significance of inquiry-based dialogue in mentor-mentee relationship development. We believe it is important to emphasize that throughout our research together we have consistently engaged in a reiterative and recursive process of inquiry-based dialogue, wherein we share our experiences and then collaboratively build upon these insights in order to construct the cohesive central narrative grounding this article. We model this approach in the section that follows, where we recount three "critical insights" that emerged from our reflection on our mentorship relationship over time.

Three Critical Insights

Critical Insight #1: Philosophical Beliefs Influence Mentorship Relationships

In our initial meeting and work together, we found that there were areas of overlap and also areas of divergence in how we articulated some of our core philosophical beliefs about the functions of schooling. Kathy tended to express a concern with emancipatory, creative and holistic approaches to teaching-learning processes and the mentor-mentee relationship, while Rhiannon tended to talk about the sociopolitical context, processes and intentions of schooling. Despite the different ways that we spoke about our philosophical beliefs, however, we found that we shared a common set of values. We each strongly believed that schools should be spaces where students are supported in building skills at critical thinking and creative self-expression in order to help them agentively shape their lives and the world in socially just ways.

We believe that part of what allowed our mentorship relationship to grow and strengthen was our willingness to hear about each other's core philosophical beliefs, and to consider how these beliefs might (re)shape our own understandings about ourselves as teachers and the work of teachers in schools.

> *Rhiannon*: I saw you as embracing a very democratic approach in your mentorship, as wanting a horizontal space for us to work and exist in. I saw you as a person I could learn much from, and I felt that you really

cared and listened. You created space for me to grow by being responsive to where I was at, rather than telling me how to change or grow.

Kathy: At the time, I was thinking about this more from the perspective of trying to be more collaborative in order to create a safe space for us to co-inquire and co-learn in. Now I realize that we were talking about the same thing, but just in a different way.

Rhiannon: I was grateful that you created space for me to talk and that you offered insights and wisdom – but also respected that I would develop and grow at my own pace and in unique ways based on who I was, my experiences, and my dreams for my students. You were modeling an ideal that I had in terms of mentoring – mentoring where we both could contribute and build ideas, and where you didn't tell me how to be a teacher, but let me develop into the teacher I could become.

Kathy: As a teacher and learner who had recently completed an arts-informed doctoral exploration (Mantas, 2004), I was also coming to the mentee-mentor relationship from an artful perspective. So, how can we co-create this space? How can we make art together – that is, teach and learn and be in this space together in an artful way? For me, we were going to co-create a teaching-learning environment and it was really important that when you walked in, you felt welcome to bring all of yourself (physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, etc.) to the experience. A co-created space is one that nurtures respect, care, trust, reciprocity, vulnerability, risk-taking, relationship, collaboration, co-inquiry, and open dialogue. And it is critical to the mentor-mentee relationship, and more generally to the teaching-learning process.

Kathy conceptualized our mentorship relationship as primarily focused on collaborative and emancipatory processes, while Rhiannon understood it as horizontal, responsive and democratic. While we talked about our space of critical reflection using different language, we were essentially talking about the same concept. We each valued a space of reciprocity and openness where we could share individual stories and ideas and explore how we could put them into conversation with each other.

During our formal mentorship period, we spent a great deal of time talking, and walking and talking, through ideas and questions that surfaced, and thinking strategically and creatively about how these problems affected our ideas and practice, and how we could address them through tweaking, altering, and reframing our work in the classroom and school. We discovered that quality and in-depth dialogue involves slowing down, listening, presence, openness, the establishment of authentic relationships between mentors and mentees (Mezirow

& Taylor, 2009), and the creation of a hospitable collaborative environment (Mantas & Miezitis, 2014; Mantas & Schwind, 2014).

Critical Insight #2: Questioning Supports Learning

Together we created a mentorship learning space that embraced questioning. We were curious to learn about each others' experiences in the world, and linked our identities as teachers with the work that we were doing in schools. We each felt that our work in schools was strongly linked with our ethical positions and with our goals for student learning. We felt strongly that being a teacher involves a constant questioning and critical reflection on practice and values.

> *Kathy*: I met you like I would meet any colleague. This way of meeting each other, as equals and as collaborators and co-inquirers, created a space for both of us to have these kinds of critical conversations. Having these conversations with you kept me in touch with why and how I was there, and what mattered to me and why. It is very easy to become complacent and complicit, and move away from being more thoughtful in our approach to teaching-learning.

> *Rhiannon*: Yes, it is really easy to be complacent and complicit. Maybe that is why the practicum felt so hard at times. I was torn between this desire to teach and to make a difference with students, but also this feeling that I didn't want to be pulled into the system, to become complacent or just another cog in the wheel.

> *Kathy*: It is very easy to go down that path.

> *Rhiannon*: Yes, but hearing that you went through this too, as an established teacher, made me feel that teaching holds space for questioning. For example, I remember us talking about the label "at-risk," what the term means, and how and to whom we apply it. I remember you were very critical of the term, and how your questions also made me critical of my own use of this term. Also, at the time I was feeling very disillusioned with the structure of schooling, and was thinking a lot about how schools could be made more democratic, more open to being shaped and formed by students and teachers together. You listened to my questions and dialogued with me when issues surfaced during the practicum that conflicted with my hopes for schooling and my work as a teacher. You gave me hope that as a teacher I could do things differently, and make my classroom a responsive, democratic and caring space for students.

> *Kathy*: Engaging with you in a meaningful way through open dialogue, and thinking critically about the space that we were in and shaping

together, kept me honest too. Creating safe spaces for vulnerable and crucial dialogue to surface is, I believe, central to inviting questions – of all sorts and without judgment – to take form and be articulated.

Sincerity was wrapped up in criticality and reflection. We sought to create a reflective space that allowed us to engage with the questions–and all questions were welcome–that surfaced with depth and integrity. As mentor and learner, Kathy felt it was important to listen to the questions raised by Rhiannon, and found the questions to hold significance for reflecting upon her own professional practice. Rhiannon felt comfortable asking questions due to feeling supported and heard by Kathy.

Through this process, we learned that "authentic relationships also allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information and dilemmas openly, and achieve a greater mutual and consensual understanding" (Taylor, 2009, p. 13). We believe that this in turn creates the space for learning "where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed" (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). We grounded our mentorship experience in the perspective that sincerity and inquisitiveness allowed us to explore and remain true to our values.

Critical Insight #3: Embracing Complexity

Teaching involves a continual process of decision-making that engages and puts into conversation the values of the schooling institution and one's personal values. At times, reconciling institutional values with personal values creates dissonance for both new and established teachers. Mentorship relationships offer an opportunity for emerging and more established teachers to notice institutional structures that impact the daily life of schools, teachers and learners, and to think through possible responses.

In our mentor-mentee relationship, we were keenly aware of the ways in which the institution of schooling presented both possibilities and barriers for our practice as teachers. Our practice of inquiry-based dialogue allowed us to talk in explicit and implicit ways about the institutional structures of schools, and how we as teachers could navigate these structures.

Rhiannon: Before I came to work with you, I had done a lot of thinking about the ways that schooling reproduces unequal power dynamics. I wanted schooling to help students challenge this power, and for schools to have a different structure, one that challenged these dynamics at their core. This is why I wasn't sure that teaching in a mainstream school was right for me, at that time. The environment seemed too restrictive for

teachers. But in the time working with you, I started to realize that maybe schools were more flexible than I had thought.

Kathy: When you are in the environment, in addition to being mindful of how you are being shaped by, and how you are helping to shape, the space and environment, you are likewise resisting aspects of it. In some ways this is what keeps you attentive, and constantly reflecting on what you are doing and why, while trying not to be complacent or complicit. Trying to be a better teacher, and looking at what it means to teach and learn from a hopeful, mindful and critical viewpoint, allows teachers to develop a more holistic, encompassing, inclusive, equitable, and creative approach.

In this dialogue, Rhiannon points to the restrictions she experienced within the school site, but locates Kathy as a model for thinking about how to work around or flex such perceived systemic restrictions. Kathy responds with the idea that as teachers the challenge is to think creatively and imaginatively about how to work within and beyond the structure to do meaningful, thoughtful and responsive work from a place of possibility and hope. Popescu-Mitroi and Mazilescu (2013), drawing on the work of McDonald (2002) and Rowley (1999), state that "the ability to communicate hope and optimism to the mentee" (p. 3563) is important to an effective and constructive mentorship relationship.

Our dialogue highlights how teaching is a complex, relational, and artful act, and that the process of becoming a teacher is an ongoing one. Together we came to appreciate further the dialogic nature of teacher identity and teaching (Britzman, 1991), and reciprocity in the mentor-mentee relationship.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented how a caring, thoughtful and non-hierarchical practitioner inquiry dialogue process – what we call inquiry-based dialogue – holds potential for supporting both mentor and mentee in engaging with a critical reflective practice that reinforces ongoing professional development. We have shown that this dialogic process is supportive of a critical reflective practice that centers on a contemplative approach to our work as mentors, mentees and educators while participating in applied learning programs.

At core, we argue that inquiry-based dialogue supports relationship development among mentees and mentors in applied learning programs by providing space for a horizontal and mutual engagement in key critical questions about practice, leading to a shared learning experience. We believe that mentorship presents a valuable opportunity for both mentor and mentee to raise questions about their own practice with students in schools and the broader

institution of schooling, and to explore these questions through critical dialogue and reflection (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). Together, mentor and mentee may identify spaces of contention within their practice in schools and develop meaningful approaches to navigate institutional constraints. Fundamentally, this orientation is enabled through dialogic practice and a worldview that embraces co-inquiry and co-learning. The mentor in particular must take up a relational approach that positions her/him/them as learner and models for the mentee a process of reflective thinking through, rather than knowing.

In applied learning opportunities, including preservice teacher education field experience placements, we encourage inquiry-based dialogue and orientations. Such an orientation invites a "critical examination of power relations and structures that produce teachers (and cultural myths)" (Fenimore-Smith, 2004, p. 238) and critical reflection to reveal and consider biases, assumptions, and beliefs (Hussein, 2007); views the process of becoming a teacher (and teacher mentor) as ongoing and rooted in the personal (Cole and Knowles, 2000); considers teaching as complex (Britzman, 1991), relational, and creative; understands the mentor-mentee relationship as evolving (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010) and emerging within the context of a caring relationship (Noddings, 2012); acknowledges the importance of relationship in mentoring (Hobson, 2012) and the transformative potential of positive and productive teaching-learning/mentoring relationships (Hussein, 2007); reconceptualizes the role of field experience in preservice teacher education as a collaborative site of inquiry (Jacobs, 2014); and, chooses to nourish the agency of preservice teachers (Bieler, 2010).

We believe that this article offers insight into what it means to grow and maintain an engaged and horizontal mentor-mentee relationship that centers critical reflection and questioning at its core. It is our hope that in sharing our experience and ideas, more mentorship partners in applied learning programs, mentor/associate teachers, preservice teacher educators, and preservice teachers might be inspired to share their positive and productive mentor-mentee relationship experiences, practices, and stories. This is a valuable endeavor, as it is in the telling of our stories, and the sharing of our experiences through thoughtful dialogue, that we come to know and build community (Pagano, 1990). Through telling our stories, we can begin to move towards fostering more committed, caring, respectful, supportive and responsive communities (Roland & Beckford, 2010) of teaching-learning and mentoring practices within the context of preservice teacher education and applied learning more broadly.

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