

**Virtually Connected:  
Utilizing Case Studies to Support Mentor Teachers in Times of Uncertainty**

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**Abstract:** The pivot toward remote teaching and learning has undoubtedly complicated the work of preservice mentor teachers. In this article, school leaders, boundary spanners, and university leadership share a concerted effort to support clinical teacher mentors in a virtual setting. More specifically, it highlights the use of case studies to (1) teach mentoring concepts and (2) discover strategies for mentoring in virtual learning environments. The design and implementation of case studies is based on frameworks for experiential learning and the four roles of the preservice mentor teacher. Teacher educators may find this approach helpful for building clinical capacity by providing professional development for mentoring teachers within both traditional and virtual learning environments.

**Keywords:** clinical teacher preparation, teacher development, mentoring, mentoring roles, virtual learning

**NAPDS Nine Essentials Addressed:**

- Essential 2: Clinical Preparation – A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.
- Essential 3: Professional Learning and Leading – A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice or inquiry.
- Essential 4: Reflection and Innovation – A PDs makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

### **Virtually Connected: Utilizing Case Studies to Mentor Teachers in Times of Uncertainty Introduction**

When the education world pivoted to virtual teaching and learning, mentor teachers struggled to teach remotely while simultaneously supporting the development of their teacher candidate. Educator preparation programs were forced to rethink and recalibrate the professional development necessary to support mentor teachers during this time of unprecedented uncertainty. Out of this uncertainty emerged the use of case studies to simulate the experience of mentoring and to discover new strategies for mentoring in a virtual environment. In the following article, we demonstrate how to design and discuss case studies as part of a mentoring workshop based on a Framework for Experiential Learning and research describing the four roles of a mentor teacher.

#### **The Role of Mentoring in Clinically Based Teacher Preparation**

In November of 2010, the NCATE released the landmark Blue Ribbon Panel Report calling for a clinically-based approach to teacher preparation. clinical preparation and partnerships for improved student learning under the expert tutelage of skilled clinical educators (NCATE, 2010). Since 2015, efforts to extend and deepen clinical teacher preparation in New Jersey have led to widespread changes, the greatest of which featured the expansion of clinical experiences. This included the promotion of a yearlong clinical experience that requires candidates to (a) complete 50 hours of clinical practice prior to the yearlong experience, (b) complete a minimum of 100 clinical hours prior to full time clinical practice, and (c) remain in the same placement for their full-time clinical internship.

High-quality clinical internships are central to helping teacher candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to demonstrate a positive impact on P-12 students' learning and development. A review of clinical experience programs by the Education Commission for the States found that a common characteristic of high-quality clinical experiences was strong supervision by well-trained mentor teachers (Allen, 2003). The research exploring the importance of the clinical practice indicates that preservice mentor teachers play a pivotal and influential role in the experience. The expanded roles of a clinical teacher mentor are even more diverse and dynamic: they involve serving as a model, co-teacher, coach, and reflective practitioner. Clinical teacher mentors have tremendous influence over the beliefs and future practices of teacher candidates working in their classrooms.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) agree that expert guidance is needed if novices are to receive the modeling, coaching, and feedback they require. They also note that successful clinical experiences include (1) modeling of good practices by expert teachers who make their thinking visible (2) frequent opportunities to practice with continuous formative feedback and coaching (3) multiple opportunities to relate classroom work to university coursework, and (4) structured opportunities to reflect on practice with an eye toward improving it. Pre-service teachers develop their skills when they learn, experiment, and reflect on their practice with feedback from a mentor who has more expertise (Borden, 2014).

However, the research indicates a lack of consistent training for clinical teacher mentors. In cases where preparation courses are available for those mentoring a pre-service teacher, it has been found that they are often program specific and provide limited information about the nature and role of mentoring (Hall et al., 2008). It is often assumed that the classroom teacher's experience will enable them to mentor a pre-service teacher effectively and provide a worthwhile

experience for the latter (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). Unfortunately, many classroom teachers are not well prepared for mentoring, particularly when difficulties arise with the pre-service teacher (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Valeni & Vogrinc, 2007). In the absence of preparation or training, many classroom teachers revert to their own experiences as pre-service teachers and duplicate the methods used by their own supervising teachers (Clarke et al., 2012; Hobson et al., 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002).

Although mentors may be excellent practitioners, they may not be effective with adult learners. Mentors require additional training to best serve the needs of those they support, especially in times of uncertainty (Clarke et al., 2012). Mentoring practices, according to Wang and Odell (2002), can be cultivated through professional development for mentoring:

Research suggests that mentor preparation can substantially influence knowledge of particular mentoring techniques and skills to shape their mentoring practice. Research that has specifically investigated the effects of mentoring on pre-service teachers suggests that mentor training increases the positive impact that mentoring can have on the growth of both the skills and knowledge of the mentees (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002).

### **The Mentor Academy**

In an effort to build greater capacity for mentoring yearlong teacher candidates, Monmouth University introduced the Mentor Academy workshop series in the fall of 2015. Teachers from one of 29 partner schools are invited each semester to participate in ten hours of professional development on mentoring, conducted over four sessions. Since its inception, the Mentor Academy has helped to better prepare over 400 yearlong clinical mentors from partner schools. At its core, the Academy affords the university the opportunity to better address the role of clinical experiences in learning to teach, the assessment of teacher candidate performance in clinical settings, and the development of profession-ready graduates who can fluidly enact teaching strategies and positively impact student learning from the moment they enter the classroom.

In this article, we examine the use of case studies as an example of facilitating the professional development of mentor teachers in a virtual learning environment. We begin by explaining two frameworks utilized in designing the curriculum for the Mentor Academy. The first characterizes teacher development through the Framework for Experiential Learning, a matrix of processes contributing to the growth of the teacher candidate in clinical settings. This framework is helpful for designing case studies that include, action, emotion, cognition and awareness, four key components of learning through experience. The second is a characterization of the four roles of the mentor teacher as professional colleague, co-teacher, coach, and reflective partner. The four roles provide insight into the different types of interactions that mentors may have with their teacher candidates and how they might approach mentoring.

### **Teacher Development**

Our approach to conceptualizing teacher development is constructed around four components of experiential learning: action, emotion, cognition, and awareness. This approach extends models of experiential learning based on action and cognition to also include the influence of emotion and awareness. The incorporation of these four provides a richer, more inclusive, more holistic conceptualization of experiential learning. Theoretically, there is strong support for including all four, and practically, the addition of emotion and awareness provides a fuller conception of classroom experience. This is especially helpful when designing new cases.

Including each of the four ensures that mentor teachers will have ample opportunity to practice a wide range of mentoring skills.

In Figure 1, each of the four components of experiential learning is represented in the first four columns of the Framework for Experiential Learning (FEL). In the fifth column is context, or the place where experiential learning occurs. Each of these five columns is broken down even further into multiple levels corresponding to sub personal, personal, social, and the world. The personal occurs at the individual level, the social at the group level, and the world refers to the broader context for learning. By adopting FEL, experiential learning processes can be observed from multiple perspectives, thereby ensuring an appropriate level of complexity for the case study design.

**Figure 1**

*Design Framework for Experiential Learning*

	<i>Action</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Cognition</i>	<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Context</i>
<b>Subpersonal</b>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Disposition</i>	<i>Perception</i>	<i>Attention</i>	<i>Ground</i>
<b>Personal</b>	<i>Enaction</i>	<i>Feelings</i>	<i>Intuition</i>	<i>Intrapersonal</i>	<i>Emergent</i>
<b>Social</b>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Interpersonal</i>	<i>Familiar</i>
<b>World</b>	<i>Systems</i>	<i>Synergy</i>	<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Transpersonal</i>	<i>Novel</i>

The framework utilizes a systems perspective; in other words, all of the elements in the Framework influence each other. Changing one has an effect on all the others. For example, the sub personal level represents different components of what individual teacher candidates experience individually. Honing each or any one of them will improve performance at the personal level. Likewise, learners experience of action, emotion, cognition, and awareness at the personal level influences how the individual interacts with the group. Teachers need to be aware of fundamental motivating processes for action, their own processes as a learner, how to use their knowledge to influence the learning of their students, and finally, how to create the conditions for the expansion of their practice or the discovery of new teaching methods.

Experiential learning occurs through the interaction between a teacher candidate and a student. As they interact, each influences the other (Gallagher, 2020). Action begins with a purpose that is enacted through a single individual, which leads to interactions with another or within a group. The novel or unfamiliar part of the interaction triggers experiential learning through changes in emotions, perception, thoughts, and behaviors that result in experiential

learning (Dewey, 1963; Kolb, 1984; Perls et al., 1994). With practice, teachers increase in their skill level; their behaviors, both verbal and physical, become more complex; they become more autonomous in their actions; and they make more decisions independently. To foster development in students, they must encourage a similar type of growth. The creation of systems; whether management, motivation, or learning systems; results in a structured approach to fostering the type of developmental growth described above.

Through action, emotions arise within the individual. How the individual reacts to his interaction with the context depends in part on his initial disposition. Dispositions can color perceptions and affect how environmental challenges are perceived and processed. Action is affected by the feelings that ensue from the individual's reaction to an encounter with the environment (Prinz, 2004). This emotion becomes the motivation for action - or the lack of it. Positive emotions that acknowledge and accept the reality of the world around are associated with expeditious movement through the environment. Negative emotions are associated with emotional resistance and the inhibition of action. Emotions influence our actions, interactions, thinking, and level of awareness. Because emotions can be positively cultivated, they play a critical role in teaching and learning to teach. While some emotional reactions are instinctive, many can be influenced by our values, judgements, perceptions, and more largely our narrative. In this case, teachers are working on themselves and managing themselves so they can better influence their students' emotional experience.

Action and interaction between the individual, the group, and the world form the basis for embodied cognition (Varela et al., 2016). The role of thought is to construct new cognitive relationships that can predict and guide behaviors to make adjustments or to solve problems in context. Thinking is often sparked by problems, which are often solved using both tacit and explicit thinking. Through the repetition of purposes, actions, lesson plans, and interactions with students, teachers move from a kind of fuzzy impression of feelings, images, and gestalts to schemas they may eventually link to educational research and theory. Teachers are able to simultaneously think on a more abstract level with greater awareness and control over their thinking. The emergence of explicit abstract knowledge provides more control, more ability to change, and more ability to work across contexts.

Awareness is recognition of relationships in an instant, whether simple or complex – like the “aha” moment in the creative process, an instantaneous moment of recognition that occurs in the present moment (Prinz, 2002). That differs from cognition, which evolves in a linear sequence before, during, and after the experience (Varela et al., 2016). By cultivating attention, teacher candidates can foster their development by becoming more aware of their emotions, their actions and their thinking, as well as their students (Wu, 2014). Focusing more attention on the present moment provides more content for thought.

### **The Four Roles of the Mentor Teacher**

In the 2019-2020, one of authors completed a qualitative research study, the goals of which were to examine (a) the role of pre-service mentor teachers within a clinical teacher preparation model, (b) the pre-service teacher mentors' training and preparation for those roles, and (c) the pre-service teacher mentors' perceived needs regarding additional training and support (Falco, 2020). This study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What do pre-service teacher mentors report as their role in the guidance and development of yearlong teacher candidates?
2. What do pre-service teacher mentors perceive as the most effective tools to support the

various roles of a yearlong clinical mentor?

3. What do preservice teacher mentors perceive they need to mentor yearlong teachers more effectively?

Findings from the study identified four primary roles for mentoring: (a) mentor as professional colleague, (b) mentor as co-teacher, (c) mentor as coach, and (d) mentor as reflective partner. Research findings from this study linked the four primary roles of preservice mentor teachers to the mentoring dispositions, strategies, and tools referenced in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Mentoring Dispositions, Strategies, and Tools*

Mentoring Dispositions	Mentoring Strategies	Mentoring Tools
Transformations in Thinking	Relationship Building	Personality Inventory
Collegiality	Engagement	Orientation Guides
Collaboration	Communication	The Development Curriculum
Coaching	Co-teaching	Co-teaching Strategies
Reflective Practice	Co-planning	Video Coaching
	Modeling	
	Feedback	
	Questioning	
	Self-Reflection	

Mentor as a Professional Colleague linked the temperament, habits, and mindset of an effective yearlong clinical mentor with collegiality, collaboration, coaching, and reflection. Professional development experiences that cause mentors to thoughtfully revisit their first years of teaching can engender a disposition of acceptance toward beginning teachers (Rowley, 1999). Professional development should also include strategies and tools that encourage mentors to reflect on their personality and communication styles. These can provide valuable insight into the way they approach mentoring and communication with candidates, students, and colleagues.

The mentor as co-teacher addresses the most effective strategies used to promote the development of yearlong teacher candidates. Mentors must be prepared to communicate co-teaching and co-planning expectations, explain and model the use of various co-teaching strategies, and connect co-teaching to tools such as the Developmental Curriculum, which outlines a developmental sequence of teaching experiences (Henning et al., 2019). Activities that promote collaboration and coordination can also emphasize the qualities of a positive co-teaching relationship.

The mentor as coach addressed the practical tools used to support the mentoring of yearlong teacher candidates. Addressing the professional development of this role should include greater attention to coaching strategies, tools and dispositions. Topics must include adult learning, conferencing strategies, questioning techniques, listening to understand, coaching responses, approaches to building receptivity to feedback, strategies for depersonalizing feedback, and ways in which to encourage critical self-inquiry. Greater attention to this role will allow yearlong clinical mentors to be more deliberate, systematic, and accurate when providing instructional support.

The mentor as reflective partner centers on strategies and tools that assist with facilitating reflective dialogue with teacher candidates. This may include attention to the use of video recording as a tool for encouraging self-reflection, verbalization, and dialogue. Candidates can videotape a particular teaching segment, reflect privately using one of several rubrics, and engage in dialogue with their mentor thereafter.

### **Case Studies**

The above descriptions of the Framework for Experiential Learning and the four roles of mentor teachers are the foundation for the Mentoring Academy. In this section we show how these descriptions can be used to create and discuss authentic case studies for the purpose of fostering the mentoring of teacher candidates. A new approach was needed to support clinical educators, who were forced to rethink learning through experience as they adapted to new school districts policies regarding observing and recording live instruction. Analyzing case studies helped us think through the new teaching environment, become more aware of the new approaches taken by mentor teachers, and foster the discovery new mentoring approaches through the discussion.

We realized that our cases must address two significant components of mentoring during the pandemic. The mentors in the Academy needed new skills for mentoring in a virtual, hybrid or in-person setting with shortened school days, masks and social distancing. Further, they needed to also provide teacher candidates with insight into how teaching would occur in a “normal” classroom setting, for example, during small group instruction, when students are sitting near one another, sharing materials, and closely collaborating with one another. Discussions with various stakeholders led to the following two questions in preparation for the 2020-2021 Mentoring Academy.

- How could we prepare clinical interns for teaching in a pandemic, while still providing them with appropriate knowledge of “traditional” teaching?
- How could we effectively teach mentors to take on this monumental task and support them in a virtual environment?

By using case studies, the mentors could examine a scenario to identify actions, emotions, awareness, cognition and context. To illustrate how this process works, we have shared two example case studies. Both address mentoring in virtual classrooms. In each case, we first ask mentors to reflect on the teacher candidate’s experience from the four perspectives discussed above: action, emotion, cognition, and awareness. After they had completed their discussion of the analysis, we asked them to assume the four different roles of the mentor teacher, then strategize about the best way to facilitate the growth of teacher candidates in each of those experiences. To demonstrate our approach to these discussions, we offer an analysis of two different case studies below, the first of an elementary teacher candidate and the second a high school science teacher.

### **Case Study #1: Elementary**

*Ms. Harris is a Yearlong Clinical Intern in third grade at Main Street Elementary School. Her students chose one of two options to start the school year: attending in person five days a week on an early dismissal schedule or attending virtually. By the end of September, the class consists of five remote learners and thirteen in person learners, sitting six feet apart at individual desks fitted with shields.*

*Ms. Harris delivers instruction using Smartboard for the students physically in the classroom and via Zoom for virtual students. She has become proficient at using the Zoom platform and many of the digital tools that the school district has provided for instruction. During conferences, her mentor teacher tells Ms. Harris that her lessons are well designed.*

*When observing a math lesson on fractions, the mentor notes that Ms. Harris has projected a Google Slides presentation with various graphics with examples of fractions. She is sitting at the desktop computer in the front of the room so the virtual students can hear and see her. In the back part of the room, it is noted that the students are quietly talking with each other and not paying attention to Ms. Harris' instruction. She does not notice and keeps proceeding through the slides.*

*Ms. Harris begins to circulate around the room when the students move on to independent practice with fractions. The students in the back area of the room all raise their hands because they do not understand how to complete the assignment. Ms. Harris feels flustered and begins aggressively questioning the students.*

*Soon she hears her virtual students calling her name. She quickly makes her way up to the desktop and pulls up a whiteboard on Zoom to show the students some other strategies. Other students are asking for help in the room and Ms. Harris tells them that they need to wait. The end of the math class comes, and she tells the students to finish the assignment for homework.*

### **Teacher Development**

Below are illustrations of our discussion on the case described above. We organized our discussion around the Framework for Experiential Learning and the four roles of the mentor teacher. In the following subsections, we discuss how we used those two lenses to more fully explore the complexity of mentoring teacher candidates in a virtual environment.

#### ***Action***

We began the discussion by asking this question: "As a mentor, what actions did you see Ms. Harris specifically take in the lesson?" Ms. Harris was attentive to her virtual learners by using the digital tools to engage them in the lesson. She prepared a visual on the Smartboard for all learners, responded to students negatively when they did not understand the material, and circulated the room to attend to the needs of the learners. When discussing this case, the mentors were quick to identify strategies to improve her interactions with students. As leaders in the academy, we also stressed the importance of encouraging clinical interns to reflect on their actions and appropriate in the lesson. We also reminded the mentor teachers that Ms. Harris is a preservice teacher who is learning, and therefore needs positive reinforcement, just as much as she needs feedback regarding areas for improvement.

#### ***Emotion***

The actions conversation segued perfectly into a discussion of the emotions at play in the



scenario. It was clear from the discussion that Ms. Harris's reaction stemmed from frustration with the students who did not grasp the concept. Additionally, she seemed overwhelmed by managing the virtual and in-person learners simultaneously. The complexity and difficulties involved were subjects of much reflection by the mentor teachers. They commented that an inexperienced preservice teacher might not yet have the skill set to manage this new kind of instruction.

During the discussion, we explored ways could the mentors act as a reflective partner to provide guidance in managing stress and finding ways to control her frustration. Empathizing with the teacher candidate as a reflective partner promotes honest discussions and strengthens the mentoring relationship. Engaging in conversation helps put the intern at ease and in turn elicits a more appropriate response to students. It is critical for the teacher candidate to realize that successfully managing her own emotions will result in more positive interactions with students, which will ultimately lead to a more positive outlook by the teacher candidate and a sense of synergy with the class.

### ***Cognition***

The mentors quickly recognized the relationship between Ms. Harris' emotions and thinking. Although her lesson plans were well structured and clearly demonstrated a variety of creative teaching strategies, the mentors concluded that her frustration stemmed in part from her unrealistic expectations that she connect with each student perfectly. So, when the inattentive students started asking questions, Ms. Harris appeared disappointed they didn't grasp the material better. We asked the mentors to collaboratively analyze and discuss her thinking to collectively discover the best strategies to alleviate her concerns.

### ***Awareness***

It was immediately clear to the mentors that Ms. Harris lacked an awareness of effective classroom management. She was not aware that students in the back of the room were not attentive and were whispering among each other. Her focus was more intrapersonal; she was attentive to her own perceptions of how the material was delivered rather than how it was received. Her aggressive questioning solidified the mentor's observation that she lacked the interpersonal awareness needed to manage a classroom effectively.

A question was posed for the mentors to discuss in breakout rooms, "How would you make Ms. Harris more aware of how she presented and executed this lesson?" Many of the mentors talked about sharing their own personal stories about situations and how they handled them. We also encouraged them to foster purposeful noticing to teacher candidates to enhance their awareness. Purposeful noticing entails making very focused observations, in this case on classroom management, to enhance awareness. It helps the candidate to become more aware of her students, which is interpersonal awareness, as well as increasingly aware of the importance of continually striving to extend her awareness. We refer to her awareness of her unawareness as transpersonal awareness.

### **The Roles of the Mentor Teacher**

In this section, we discuss approaches to mentoring through the different relationships mentors have with teacher candidates. An awareness of these relationships can help the mentor more effectively cultivate different aspects of the teacher candidates' experiences.

***Mentor as Professional Colleague***

This role of *Mentor as Professional Colleague* is grounded in dispositions, strategies, and tools that promote relationship building, engagement, and communication. Effective yearlong clinical mentors are capable of fostering strong, caring mentoring relationships by building trust with teacher candidates. A case study provides an excellent means to discuss the role of the mentor teacher as a colleague, a relationship that encourages teacher candidates to feel comfortable about asking questions, making mistakes, and experimenting with new strategies.

***Mentor as Co-Teacher***

In the role of a co-teacher, mentor teachers should work to ensure the candidate becomes more familiar, skilled, and comfortable with co-teaching. It may include co-planning to discuss goals, specific roles within a lesson, and management strategies or the use of varying co-teaching strategies to place the candidate in varying roles and situations that will build confidence in the hybrid learning environment. Co-teaching strategies are based on the work of Cook and Friend (1995) and may include (a) one teach, one observe; (b) one teach, one assist; (c) parallel teaching; (d) station teaching; (e) alternative teaching; and (f) team teaching. While engaged in co-teaching, mentor teachers should carefully observe teacher candidates and provide feedback that facilitates their performance.

***Mentor as Coach***

Pre-service teachers enter the yearlong experience with varying degrees of skill in instructional design and delivery. Whatever their skill level, effective yearlong clinical mentors must be willing to coach teacher candidates to improve their performance. Helping a candidate in becoming more confident and capable in the co-taught classroom may utilize the “I Do, We Do, You Do” approach. Mentor teacher modeling may help the teacher candidate better understand how her mentor reasons through situations, how she draws conclusions from their experiences, and how she uses those conclusions to inform her decision making.

The use of feedback is also foundational to the role of *Mentor as Coach*. Rowley (1999) maintained that training in this area should help mentors value description over interpretation in the coaching process, develop multiple methods of classroom observation, employ research-based frameworks as the basis for reflection, and refine their conferencing and feedback skills. Some coaching strategies that can be introduced through case studies include listening to understand, the use of paraphrasing to establish a shared understanding of the situation, and the use of a “compliment sandwich” to build receptivity to feedback, and ways in which to de-personalize feedback.

***Mentor as Reflective Partner***

As a reflective partner, mentor teachers can foster teacher candidate development through reflective dialogue. This may include the use of video recording as a tool for encouraging self-reflection, verbalization, and dialogue. A mentor may encourage the candidate to videotape a particular teaching segment, reflect privately using one of several performance assessment rubrics, and engage in dialogue afterwards. This may help the candidate become better aware of herself and the interactions occurring around her.

### **Case Study #2: High School**

*Mr. Thompson is actively engaged in the first semester of his Yearlong Clinical Internship at Valley High School. He has been quite excited to be working with his mentor teaching freshman biology in the science department, even if the school is fully virtual. The mentor and Mr. Thompson have been co-teaching on Google Meet to deliver instruction to the students. They only know each other through Google Meet: they have not met in person. Mr. Thompson and his mentor teacher have worked hard to adapt to virtual teaching. For example, they used YouTube videos to demonstrate dissections normally be done in the lab. Teacher mentor modeling has helped Mr. Thompson has become proficient with Google Slides and other virtual platforms.*

*When Mr. Thompson took the lead in teaching classes, he struggled to engage his students and most of the students left their cameras off. His mentor teacher's feedback suggested that he was on target with his procedures and activities outlined in his lesson plans. But if he called on someone, they would give a short answer, or say they didn't know. He knew that he should be questioning students to elicit high level thinking, but he was keenly aware that the students would answer with their silence. His mentor recommended telling students to turn their cameras on and off to signal agreement or disagreement with statements. However, Mr. Thompson did not believe that to be an effective questioning technique.*

*Shortly after, the mentor noticed that Mr. Thompson, once so eager to take the lead in lessons, had stopped volunteering to teach. He told his mentor that he preferred a more supportive role as the co-teacher. She noticed a concurrent decrease in his enthusiasm. It seemed as if he was just going through the motions to complete the basic requirements for the first 100 hours of his internship.*

### **Teacher Development**

#### ***Action***

Mr. Thompson familiarized himself with the available online teaching tools, prepared high-quality lessons, and developed high level discussion questions. Negatively, he did not take the advice of his mentor and ignored her suggestion to increase engagement. That eventually led to retreating and shutting down. The mentors were asked, "What would be the first steps you would take to support Mr. Thompson virtually?" For them, the key to the problem was relational: Mr. Thompson had not met either his students nor the mentor in person. Thus, the mentor teachers discussed strategies for building relationships. Hopefully, those strategies would help Mr. Thompson gain some confidence, improve his interactions and return to his energetic and positive self.

#### ***Emotion***

Through the discussions, it was determined Mr. Thompson was struggling with his emotions. He started out as an eager participant and it was clear to see that he was feeling defeated. The students lack of engagement fed his feelings of inadequacy and eventually led to his lack of energy and interest. Everyone agreed the mentor should serve as a reflective partner, reassuring him that as a team they would work through these struggles together. We asked the mentors to examine their own emotions first, then consider the feelings of Mr. Thompson. We hoped this strategy would provide additional insight into addressing the mentee's emotional state.

### *Cognition*

A central part of the discussion in this case study was a reflection on virtual teaching in this Zoom or Google Meet environment. Although the mentors were expert with in person teaching strategies acquired over a period of years, they were novices as “virtual” educators. The mentors commented they were learning to adapt to this teaching environment through trial and error. Therefore, it is imperative that mentees be active discussants so they can better plan effective instruction for the students. Mr. Thompson could also benefit from listening to the thought processes of a veteran teacher.

### *Awareness*

In this case study, Mr. Thompson was aware that his students were not engaged and motivated. Consequently, he became disengaged with the class and was content to let his mentor take the lead in the lessons. The mentor suggested a way to improve engagement and communication with the class; however, Mr. Thompson did not heed his mentor’s advice. He had already formed his opinion about the class: they were not paying attention or even interested in the instruction. He was focused on the intrapersonal (his individual self) level and could not see that perhaps the students did care. His negative conclusions were based on his opinions and preconceived notions, rather than considering the interpersonal space. The mentors suggested surveying the students about their needs, wants and learning styles. Much can be learned from hearing the voices of the students, especially in a virtual setting. As mentors, it is critical to guide these young novice educators to examine issues from multiple perspectives to cultivate a heightened awareness of their interactions with students.

## **The Roles of the Mentor Teacher**

### *Mentor as Professional Colleague*

When assuming the role of Mentor as Professional Colleague, a focus on engagement may serve to center candidates on areas of strength and emphasis. To support Mr. Thompson through this time of uncertainty, the mentor may choose to utilize the Developmental Curriculum, a tool for coaching and reflection that is aligned with the InTASC standards. The Developmental Curriculum charts the step-by-step developmental progression of teacher candidates from the first day of clinical experience through the culmination of the clinical internship. This tool can be used for setting goals, building confidence in areas of focus and monitoring progress (Henning et al., 2019).

### *Mentor as Co-Teacher*

This case alludes to the use of at least one co-teaching strategy, but it is unclear as to the extent that multiple strategies have been utilized. Further, the co-teaching relationship in this study is threatened when the candidate expresses a reluctance to try his mentor’s suggestions. Co-planning that focuses on addressing student engagement and asking discussion questions is a good starting point here. In addition, the use of co-teaching strategies such as station teaching may allow Mr. Thompson to build confidence in these areas in a smaller setting. This may assist Mr. Thompson in connecting with his students for the purpose of promoting greater buy in and participation.

### ***Mentor as Coach***

Mentors who not only model good practice, but also model the thought process behind it, can help teacher candidates develop greater competency. In this case study, the teacher candidate struggles with higher level questioning and student engagement. After several failed attempts, the candidate shuts down and becomes disengaged. To re-engage the candidate, the mentor may opt to model a best practice. Through modeling, mentors can share their planning process, demonstrate effective teaching, alert candidates to key aspects of teaching, and model reflective thinking (Henning et al., 2019).

### ***Mentor as Reflective Partner***

As a reflective partner, mentor teachers can foster teacher candidate development by engaging in dialogue. They can include quick conversations following a specific instructional segment, troubleshooting at the end of a school day, or conducting an exit conference at the end of a clinical experience. One strategy that may assist Mr. Thompson's mentor is the Describe, Interpret, Interpret, and Justify (DIJS) model, the goal of which is to develop teacher candidates' abilities to accurately describe what is occurring in the classroom; to accurately interpret those events; to use those interpretations to develop new strategies; and to justify those strategies using past practices, research, and learning theories (Henning et al., 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Regardless of the environment, mentoring will remain a critical component of preparing new teachers. Thus, the preparation of mentor teachers will continue to be a critical element of building an effective teacher preparation program. One approach to effective mentor teacher preparation is the use of case studies, as described in this article.

Case studies can be more effectively designed and discussed if they consider the development of teacher candidates, as well as the four roles of the mentor teacher. The design of the case can incorporate important parts of the teaching experience, i.e., what the teacher candidate did, how they felt about it, how they thought about it, and their level of awareness in the context. Using the Framework for Experiential Learning facilitates the creation of case scenarios that incorporate key elements of any teaching experience.

Mentoring can be effectively taught, by considering the different roles that a mentor assumes, such as colleague, co-teacher, coach, and reflective partner. As a colleague, mentors can empathize with the challenges, frustrations, and disappointments of the profession. As a co-teacher, they can model strategies, share their thinking, and foster the awareness of teacher candidates. As a coach, they can provide critical feedback to help teacher candidates improve their performance, and as a reflective partner, they can pose questions and share their thinking in a way that stimulates reflection.

Further case studies provide an open sharing of strategies so when new contexts for mentoring emerge, like the pandemic, mentor teachers have a chance to share their strategies, thus multiplying the collective thinking of the entire group. In this article, we showed how we utilized case studies to further our knowledge in a virtual environment. By giving the mentor teachers case studies that included problems that are unique to virtual teaching, we enable the possibility to learn from our participants, as well as guide them. We fully expect that virtual mentoring strategies will continue to play an important role in a post COVID world.

Case studies are a good vehicle for furthering our own professional growth as educators. In order to foster our own growth, we have to act (try new things), persevere (push forward),

think (keep reflecting), and remain aware (stay focused in the present moment). When we were thrust into a new context, we have to take advantage of different circumstances and how the different environments fertilize our thinking as we look for new relationships and connections. This certainly was our experience as we moved forward with discussing case studies virtually. We had allowed a space for mentors to give us new insights into how mentoring can be enhanced in a virtual environment. They did not disappoint; they did a beautiful job of teaching us. We learned a lot from them, and we hope, they from us.

But work still needs to be done. We believe that utilizing case studies for discussion can extend our thinking about mentoring by building a collective knowledge of mentoring in a virtual environment. In this way, case studies provide a vehicle for a constant rethinking of the curriculum and instructional strategies.

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