

# Mentoring as More Than “Cheerleading”: Looking at Educative Mentoring Practices Through Mentors’ Eyes

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## Abstract

Traditionally, classroom teachers have been asked to “cooperate” during student teaching, providing advice to imitate and emotional support to meet immediate needs. Based on theories of educative experience, educative mentoring focuses on growth, continuity, and inquiry. The purpose of this study was to understand what educative practices look like through the eyes of 10 mentor teachers who participated in six mentor study groups across a school year. We report on mentor’s talk about and enactment of three practices: coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work. Although we introduced and gave name to particular mentoring practices, the mentors’ interpretations of what these look like when done in educative ways helped us craft the definitions we present in our findings. The findings of this study highlight that mentors benefit from professional learning that is focused on concrete practices with opportunities to develop over time in educative ways.

## Keywords

mentoring, student teaching, professional development, teacher learning

I feel like last year as a mentor teacher I was probably more of a . . . cheerleader . . . I know I did her such an injustice because I’m looking now at some things that we do here [together in the mentor study groups] . . . and just the whole explaining why I’m doing what I’m doing . . . [now] she’s grown so much.

—Lauren (pseudonym) Mentor, Grade 5

As Lauren suggests, there is more to mentoring than being an emotional cheerleader. However, many classroom teachers, like Lauren, are left to figure out how to mentor a student teacher on their own. Very often, they lack the preparation that enables them to provide high-quality support for their student teachers (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014). Much like teaching, mentoring is a complex practice to be learned, and merely having teaching experience does not mean a teacher is prepared to effectively mentor (Gareis & Grant, 2014; Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013).

Furthermore, the benefits attributed to field experiences are diminished if classroom teachers are not prepared as mentors, for classroom teachers “provide the most immediate and ongoing feedback on practice” (Grossman, 2010, p. 5). While student teachers may think they understand what teaching is and how to teach, it is not until they are immersed in field experiences that the complexities of teaching fully emerge (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). A

high-quality mentor can help a student teacher strive to embrace complex practice, rather than abandon more ambitious teaching in favor of “safer” teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p. 1029).

As student teachers cite mentors as the most important influence on their learning (Clarke et al., 2014; Gareis & Grant, 2014; Schwille, 2008), it is important to provide on-the-ground examples of educative mentoring that focus on growth, continuity, and inquiry. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what educative practices of mentoring look like through the eyes of mentors.

## Context of Study

In prior research, mentor study groups (MSGs) were created as a site for talk and reflection over time with induction year mentors (Stanulis & Bell, 2017; Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013; Stanulis, Brondyk, Little, & Wibbens, 2014; Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Stanulis, Little, & Wibbens, 2012; Stanulis &

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Russell, 2000). MSGs provided researchers with access to the thinking of teachers who were involved in a process of change in mentor practice. Through analysis of practice and conversations together, the participants helped define practices of mentoring (Dewey, 1938; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Building on this research, we launched a pilot program for 23 elementary mentor teachers in seven elementary schools partnered with our preservice teacher preparation program, based on three common mentoring practices: coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work. This professional learning experience included six MSG meetings across a yearlong student teaching experience, where mentors learned about a mentoring practice, then tried out the practice with their student teacher, audio recorded the conversation, and wrote a reflection about their experience using the practice, and discussed their enactment and reflection in the next MSG. Professional learning “implies an internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge through interaction with this information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meaning” (Timperley, 2011, p. 5). We structured the pilot program to allow for inquiry into and reflection upon the three mentoring practices.

### Theoretical Considerations

The framing of the experienced teacher as “cooperating” or “mentoring” suggests a certain kind of role within the student teaching experience. We theorize that the view of mentor teachers as “cooperating” limits the kinds of conversations mentors and student teachers have because they typically focus on the *what* of teaching. “Mentoring” involves taking on the role of a teacher educator, focusing on the *why* and *how* of teaching. Thus, we make both a rhetorical and a conceptual distinction between “cooperating teacher” and “mentor teacher” when describing the role of the classroom teacher in preparing the student teacher to be ready to teach independently. In addition, we advocate for educative mentoring, which emphasizes growth-producing experiences, rather than cooperating to simply provide a placement to practice teaching.

### Mentoring as More Than Cooperation

Traditionally, classroom teachers have been asked to “cooperate” during student teaching. Within this view of cooperation, teachers provide practical knowledge (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008), give advice meant for imitation (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996), solve problems (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005), and provide moral support as they talk about the student teacher’s experience (Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005). The traditional view of cooperating teachers emphasizes meeting the immediate needs of student teachers by allowing them to practice the *what* of teaching in a classroom. Under this view of cooperation, teachers provide

copies of lesson plans, give practical solutions to problems, or share advice with student teachers (Bradbury, 2010). Beyond these roles, the idea of a cooperating teacher typically brings to mind “nothing more than providing a place for the pre-service teacher to practice teaching” (Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, 2008, p. 343). As Lauren shared in the opening vignette, oftentimes cooperating teachers view themselves more like cheerleaders than teacher educators.

Classroom teachers can do more than just host a teacher in their classrooms—they can play a critical role in a student teacher’s development (Clarke et al., 2014) and should be prepared to be seen, and see themselves, as teacher educators. Using only traditional cooperating practices, the student teacher may not be given opportunities to grow in the same way educative mentoring practices can provide. All experiences are not educative, for “Dewey (1915, 1938) would not even call being swept along in the flow of classroom talk or activity a learning experience—not unless it was social, authentically oriented to a purpose, and guided with curricular ends in view” (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008, p. 709). Educative mentoring provides a frame for helping student teachers learn and grow as a result of analysis of experience.

### Mentoring as Providing Educative Experiences for Student Teachers

Our vision of mentoring supports novice learning and embraces the complexities of teaching. Feiman-Nemser (1998, 2001a) coined the term “educative mentor” to describe one who takes the stance of a colearner while creating growth-producing experiences for a student teacher. Such mentoring includes regular and critical conversations with an eye toward inquiry, introspection, and continued improvement (Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2001a; Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). Educative mentors not only use traditional mentoring practices that allow student teachers to practice the *what* of teaching, but they also help student teachers understand the *why and how* of teaching. Educative mentors articulate the reasoning behind instructional decisions that reveal the complexities of planning, teaching, and analyzing student learning, while foregrounding student learning. Enactment of an educative stance requires much more than providing emotional support and advice. Educative mentors collaborate with student teachers on authentic teaching tasks, continually making their own thinking visible by verbalizing their thoughts, questions, and decisions (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). They possess a vision of good teaching and understand student teacher learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, 2001b; Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspors, & Edwards-Groves, 2014). Educative mentors balance student teacher and pupil learning needs, gathering and analyzing evidence of learning for each (Bradbury, 2010). As teacher educators, mentors “find openings” for productive conversations, probe student

teacher thinking to pinpoint problems, and identify ways to address those problems (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b).

We believe educative mentoring, which involves a certain approach to enacting mentoring practices, can be learned. Therefore, the following question guided our research: What do educative practices of mentoring look like through the eyes of mentors?

### Three Practices Common to Mentoring

We studied three practices—planning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work—that are common in mentoring and seen as essential in learning to teach (Cherian, 2007; Hudson, 2013; Kang, 2017; Schwille, 2008). These three practices are integral to developing practitioners who see that planning involves complex decisions about learners and subject matter, who regularly seek feedback, and who use data to inform next steps in their instruction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). Mentors commonly observe, note what they see, and debrief with their student teachers. Mentors also plan and look at student work in some way with their student teacher. Below, we highlight key principles of each practice, including empirical grounding for the effectiveness of the practices when enacted in educative ways.

#### Planning/Coplaning

Planning is an essential component of effective instruction in learning to teach. At a basic level, planning involves identifying what will be taught and how it will be taught with the focus on teacher performance. At a complex level, planning focuses on student learning, and involves identifying what students will learn, how they will learn it, and how they will demonstrate their learning (Reeves, 2011). Most novice teachers are unaware of the importance and complexities of planning because the work of planning was invisible to them as students (Grossman et al., 2009). As novices, student teachers need assistance to develop complex planning skills to provide instruction that promotes student learning (Norman, 2011). Mentors can provide this assistance through coplaning, the collaborative planning of instruction (Cherian, 2007; Pylman, 2016).

While coplaning is considered an essential practice of mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Stanulis, 1994), the ways in which this practice is enacted vary. Mentor–mentee planning conversations are often one way and focus on logistics (Bradbury & Koballa, 2007), where the pair schedules the day’s and/or week’s events, identifying learning activities that one or both of them will teach (Schwille, 2008). The mentor may suggest changes and offer ideas, focusing on the *what* and *when* versus the *how* and *why* of lesson planning (Bradbury, 2010; Pylman, 2016). When conducted in an educative way, coplaning involves a mentor making thoughts and decisions visible to the novice (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997; Pylman, 2016; Schwille,

2008), planning out content with student learning and needs in mind (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997), and providing opportunities for the student teacher to inquire and contribute (Bradbury, 2010; Pylman, 2016). Through educative coplaning, mentors prepare student teachers to be independent decision makers (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997; Pylman, 2016). Coplaning that includes “reflecting verbally on planning . . . and deliberating on the specific learning needs of students” leads to deeper learning about planning (Hudson, 2013, p. 476). In summary, educative coplaning plays an important role in student teachers learning to teach.

#### Observing and Debriefing

Teachers need feedback to learn from their experiences and improve. Constructive feedback is needed for teachers to reach new instructional goals (Anast-May, Penick, Schroyer, & Howell, 2011; Taylor & Tyler, 2012; Voerman, Meijer, Korthagen, & Simons, 2015). While student teachers often enter classrooms anxious to learn from and in their practice, debriefing discussions with their mentors may take place infrequently, lack methodological substance, and focus largely on classroom management with limited connections to student learning (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Moving beyond superficial conversations goes against norms in the teaching culture where there are few models of the language and kind of interactions that are both critical and constructive (Stanulis, 2006).

Providing feedback in a way that advances someone’s teaching is a complex skill. For example, Hudson (2014) found that when mentors lacked a focus or ways to provide feedback, novices were not likely to receive equitable or reliable feedback. Similarly, Valencia et al. (2009) reported that unfocused feedback and lack of supporting evidence in post-observation discussions were a primary source of lost opportunities in learning to teach.

An observation and debrief become educative when mentors use evidence to analyze pupil learning while also helping the student teacher learn from her teaching and plan future instruction (Flores, Hernández, García, & Claeys, 2011; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005). Educative observing and debriefing necessitate a focus on issues of instructional significance, such as examining formative assessment strategies or types of questions the student teacher asked of different learners (Stanulis & Bell, 2017). Such a focus allows feedback to be more purposeful, providing an opportunity for further development in a specific area of teaching (Hudson, 2016). An educative debrief utilizes evidence gathered during the observation (through video, audio, or selective note taking) to focus on an area of instruction to explore together, while also encouraging student teacher voice (Stanulis et al., 2014; Timperley, 2010). Educative observing and debriefing conversations are helpful learning-to-teach opportunities for student teachers.

## Analysis of Student Work

Traditionally, analyzing student work often involved grading assignments and looking at standardized assessment data. Furthermore, Ball and Cohen (1999) warned, "Simply looking at students' work would not ensure that improved ways of looking at and interpreting such work would ensue" (p. 16). For the process of analyzing student work to be educative, it is important for the mentor to model and think aloud about individual student understanding, develop plans with the student teacher to target the needs of individual learners, reflect on instructional moves possibly influencing student learning, and discuss changes to future instruction based on this analysis (Pylman, Stanulis, & Wexler, 2017). When done in an educative way, student teachers learn ways to diagnose, notice patterns, and talk about student learning grounded in standards and knowledge of students. Student teachers also learn to articulate criteria for assignments related to standards and knowledge of student development (Stanulis & Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

The practice of analyzing student work encourages professional discourse about teaching and learning, engages teachers in reflection, and moves the focus from teaching performance to student learning (Kazemi & Franke, 2004; Little, 2002). Kazemi and Franke (2004) suggest that engaging in conversation around analysis of their students' work "deepen[s] as well as challenge[s] teachers' notions about their work as teachers" (p. 230). In addition, this practice allows student teachers to enrich their knowledge of their learners and consider instructional goals for students (Kazemi & Franke, 2004).

Although there is some agreement about the theoretical value of these particular mentoring practices, developing an on-the-ground understanding of what educative coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work actually look like in action is needed.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to understand what educative practices of mentoring look like through the eyes of participating mentors. To understand how teachers make sense of their mentoring actions (Schwandt, 2000) in the context of these practices, the research team collected a variety of qualitative data from multiple mentors across the school year. Below, we describe the context and participants in this study as well as data sources and analysis.

### Context and Participants

**MSGs.** Twenty-three elementary classroom teachers met 3 times each semester for 75 min in university-organized school-based MSGs of three to seven teachers during the 2015-2016 school year. All mentors at each school site were required to participate. These MSGs, facilitated by researchers, provided

the primary space for formal learning experiences for the mentors. Between each MSG, mentors audiotaped their practice in action with their student teachers, listened to recorded clips, and discussed their experience at the next MSG.

**Mentors.** Ten teachers were selected for data analysis (Table 1). The teachers who were selected completed 100% of required audio recordings of their mentoring practice, and distinguished themselves as mentors who were exhibiting characteristics of educative mentoring (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). Of these 10, there is at least one mentor from each school site.

**Researchers.** The research team consisted of the faculty project director, MSG facilitators, and six university field instructors. The MSG facilitators and project director prepared for and facilitated each MSG. University field instructors who supervised student teachers in the classroom sites selected mentor audio clips that demonstrated educative mentoring for the MSG to listen to, and also participated in MSG conversations by posing questions and extending ideas.

### Data Collection and Analysis

**Data sources.** Six audio recordings of mentoring conversations with the student teacher ranging from 15 to 60 min (30 min on average), six written reflections, video recordings of MSGs, and one interview with each of the 10 mentors were collected across the 2015-2016 school year. Between each MSG, mentors selected a time to engage in the practice being studied and recorded that conversation. Although the researchers were not present during the taping of the conversations, mentor recordings were transcribed. After listening to MSG meetings, we transcribed portions related to mentor understanding and enactment. At the beginning of each MSG, the mentors completed written reflections about what they learned from engaging in a specific mentoring practice. At the end of the school year, each mentor participated in an interview.

The end-of-the-year interview followed a uniform semistructured protocol where each question was asked, but probes were unique to the participant and the context. The aim of the interview was to provide an opportunity for the mentors to look back at their mentoring across the year. In the interview, we explored how the mentors described their implementation of one of the three mentoring practices (coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analysis of student work) they felt resulted in powerful student teacher learning. We also wanted to find out if and how the mentors described a shift in their mentoring after participating in the MSGs.

**Data analysis.** To understand what educative practices of mentoring look like through the eyes of 10 participating mentors, we analyzed what mentors reported they did in prior practice, ways in which they were enacting features of

**Table 1.** Mentor Demographics and Data Sources.

Mentor pseudonym	# of years teaching	# of student teachers	MSG sessions attended	Mentoring practice audio recording	Mentor written reflections	Interview with mentor
<b>District A</b>						
71% FRL; 26% White, 39% African American, 19% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 10% Other (State Data, 2015)						
<b>Ben</b> Fifth grade	15	11	6	6	6	1
<b>Jean</b> First grade	5	1	6	6	3	1
<b>Judi</b> Fourth grade	30	7	5	6	5	1
<b>Lauren</b> Fifth grade	15	2	6	6	5	1
<b>Sarah</b> First grade	16	5	6	6	6	1
<b>District B</b>						
38% FRL; 65% White, 10% African American, 13% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 9% Other (State Data, 2015)						
<b>Angie</b> Fourth grade	18	13	6	6	5	1
<b>Avery</b> Fourth grade	15	5	5	6	6	1
<b>Leanne</b> Third grade	23	8	6	6	6	1
<b>Nancy</b> First grade	6	2	6	6	6	1
<b>Tina</b> Third grade	14	2	6	6	6	1

Note. MSG = mentor study group; FRL = free and reduced-price lunch.

educative mentoring during the study, and in what ways, if any, they talked about a shift in their practice.

As multiple researchers were involved in data collection and analysis, we attended to several concerns that could threaten the validity of the study: First, data analysis decisions were made together in multiple research team meetings where we developed ideas about ways to categorize the data and shared evidence from the data for categories we were defining. Second, the field instructor who worked most closely with each mentor paired with another researcher to cowrite analytic memos to “capture [our] analytic thinking, but also to facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). Finally, the lead researcher then read each analytic memo to provide a third lens on claim assertions and evidence.

The initial cycle of analysis involved looking at data in pairs with guiding questions to develop ideas about ways to categorize the data (Maxwell, 2013). These questions included the following: How do mentors talk about using ideas promoted in the MSGs, and in what ways are mentors trying out the practices in educative ways? Transcripts from MSG meetings and mentor-written reflections were used to help each researcher construct analytic memos. The analytic memos provided an opportunity for researchers to write about their thinking and document their process of moving to potential themes (Saldana, 2009). Researchers first composed memos

individually, then shared them with a partner to begin to uncover themes within and across mentors. In supporting these themes, researchers looked for evidence of both mentor’s *talk about* and *enactment of* the practice. We examined the MSG transcripts, written reflections, and interview transcripts, and analyzed each document for evidence of *talk about* principles of educative mentoring. To construct concrete examples of what mentors were doing, we analyzed the recorded actions of mentor practice transcripts, MSG transcripts, journal reflections, and anecdotal conversations with field instructors evidencing the *enactment of* educative mentoring.

The next phase of analysis involved a move from an examination of themes across participants to an examination of themes by mentor and practice. Each researcher then designed one central claim about the focal mentor’s educative enactment of a particular practice, responding to the prompt: “This is the story of a mentor who . . .” Example claims include, “This is the story of a mentor teacher who uses scaffolding to analyze student work in her mentoring practice” and “This is the story of a mentor who learns to zoom in closely on student learning within the practice of co-planning.” The researchers linked evidence to support these claims from multiple data sources, and provided rationale for why this evidence supported the claim. Finally, we looked across the mentors chosen for each practice and compared their stories. We drew

upon patterns of what mentors were saying and doing to define what the practices look like when done in an educative way.

## Findings

Drawing from mentor–student teacher conversations, mentor-written reflections after the conversations, MSG talk, and exit interviews, we describe the ways in which the 10 mentors experience three practices common to mentoring: coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work. Within each section, we highlight examples from the mentors, while the tables at the end of each section summarize findings across all 10 mentors studied.

### Coplanning

*The practice of coplanning.* At the beginning of the school year, the mentors were asked to coplan with their student teachers. The 10 mentors reported their initial coplanning as hit or miss, expecting the student teacher to learn through exposure, giving ideas, and scheduling for the next day. Scheduling, a necessary practice that occurs within everyday instructional planning, was limited to talking about surface-level information as opposed to *educative* coplanning that dives beneath the surface to illuminate the what, why, and how of many instructional decisions that otherwise may be assumed as understood.

*Coplanning as educative mentoring.* Once the mentors tried out, recorded and reflected on their enactment of coplanning, they began to see coplanning as something more (see Table 2). After Tina recorded a coplanning session, she reflected in the next MSG:

Sometimes we take for granted all the things that we do in a lesson that we just assume that [student teachers] understand and know. They don't know how we formed the groups, or how we chose . . . that activity. I'm sure they don't because without an explanation, how would you know?

From our data sources, mentors described three parts of educative coplanning, including thinking beyond the lesson plan, exploring what students walk in with to a lesson, and focusing on what teachers want students to walk out with from a lesson.

*Thinking beyond the basic lesson plan.* Coplanning as an educative practice involves rich explanations of instructional decisions rather than simply a focus on the bare bones of a lesson. Ben realized, “There’s a lot more than ‘tomorrow we’re going to teach this book’ . . . there’s a rhyme and reason to it.” Educative coplanning necessitates the mentor explain the reasons for and concepts behind selecting certain tasks, doing things a particular way, considering the type of support

students may need at different points in the lesson, and focusing on the student learning goal. Avery explained, “It’s almost been ‘Here’s what we need to do, do it’. Or, ‘Here’s a book, read, copy out of this book and read’. Versus ‘Well let’s really talk about what does that mean?’ How could that lesson look?” In her comparison of how she used to think about coplanning to her new understanding, it is evident that Avery saw the importance of doing more than just telling what will happen in a lesson. Instead, this mentor described how she spent time talking about the reasons for her decisions in an effort to grow her student teacher’s understanding of planning.

*Exploring what students walk in with.* One element of coplanning is taking time to consider the knowledge and experiences students bring to the classroom relating to the learning goals teachers set for the lesson. This can include information gleaned from preassessments, previous experiences with how students respond to content, and a general awareness of misconceptions students may hold, along with an understanding of their background knowledge and experiences. In a coplanning session, Nancy spent time pushing her student teacher to think about students’ varied entry points into a lesson:

Nancy: One confusing concept that may come up where they might need a little extra support is this idea of treasure. I think a lot of kids are going to come in with this very concrete, “I’ve heard of treasure and it comes in a box and it’s gold coins.” They’re going to be thinking of treasure in a narrow mindset. So talking about, maybe even bringing in, showing a picture of something you treasure, as a bigger idea. If I treasure something, I think it’s important to me.

Student teacher: I was thinking, especially since I’m going home this weekend, finding something from my childhood that’s a treasure to me. And having that concrete thing for them to look at.

Nancy: That’s a good idea.

Nancy used coplanning as a way to share her prior knowledge and experiences with students at a particular grade level, and gave specific content that a student teacher would not otherwise have access to without a mentor. Through coplanning, Nancy explained *what* knowledge students enter with, and *why* it is important to consider this information. The student teacher added to this, indicating her understanding of the importance of a broader idea of treasure. They foregrounded students in the instructional decision-making process.

*Focusing on what teachers want students to walk out with.* Educative coplanning maintains a clear focus on student learning goals. In this type of coplanning, mentors and student teachers spend time thinking about the type of support and responses

**Table 2.** Coplanning Experiences.

	Retroactive reflection on prior practice	Educative practice in action	Reflection on engaging in educative practice
Ben	I [realized] “Wait, I’m doing the ‘We’re teaching this on Tuesday, and we’re teaching this on Wednesday.’”	I start out that way because I want them to come up with different strategies for solving the multiplication problem.	I found myself constantly talking about “This is what we’re introducing . . . this is <i>why</i> I do it this way.”
Jean	For me lesson planning was more about, just scheduling out a unit day by day.	Where do you see the students possibly struggling?	It was an eye opener to really re-examine my own practice and, see how do I <i>know it</i> [where it needs to be differentiated] and being able to <i>verbalize that</i> .
Judi	Sit down with me and listen to me plan . . . and me doing most of the talking.	If it’s hard for us to draw that line between, “What is volume? What is mass?” . . . then it’s going to be hard for the fourth graders.	It became more the norm to have her do more of the talking than me. I had to make sure that I was asking those probing questions.
Lauren	Ok. You got a beginning, you got a middle, you got an end? Alright let’s try it.	I’m glad you’re thinking about student misconceptions and student understanding.	I see myself purposely planning and—not describing—but I just see myself explaining things a whole lot better.
Sarah	It was just kind of a hit and miss as something occurred.	We have to explain that to them. You can’t see the wind, you can only see the affects of the wind.	It made my teaching visible . . . I’ve realized that I wasn’t doing that with my [student teacher].
Angie	I ask the same things all the time and need to get a little deeper . . . think about my own practices and why I’m doing it, and then question them about it.	In this chapter review, what do they need to be successful?	There were certain questions I internalized. What made you think of doing it this way? . . . How are you going to think about engagement?
Avery	I assume[d] learning through experience/exposure was all that was needed.	What I’m wondering is, do you have in your head ideas of what you’re expecting? Or what you think they’ll say?	I hoped to help my intern think beyond the lesson plan itself and think about all the little things . . . that play a huge role in the lesson’s success and students’ learning.
Leanne	I just gave her everything.	Let’s just break this down part by part by part.	It’s a lot more of tell me why . . . why are you choosing this, versus let’s just copy down what we have in the book.
Nancy	I was too quick to give some of the ideas as opposed to pulling it out from her.	What kind of questions will you be asking? How will you be targeting specific students?	I was going in, specifically thinking about, how I was going to get her thinking about student learning.
Tina	Here’s the plans, here’s what we’re going to do . . . It was more like a schedule.	How do you think students are going to respond?	It was good to explain . . . the thought process behind all that. Because they don’t know that.

they hope to elicit from students, and the necessary scaffolding that must occur to get students to this point. In a coplanning session, Avery focused her student teacher’s attention on learning goals:

Avery: So, what I’m wondering is, do you have in your head ideas of what you’re expecting? Or what you think they’ll say?

Student teacher: I’m starting to think that students will say, “It’s sunny out. So, it’s melting because it’s sunny out.” Or, “It’s getting warmer out.” So, they’ll kind of say things like that without particularly phrasing heat or heat energy. But, that’s what I want them to start thinking of.

Avery asked her student teacher to envision both how students might respond and what student understanding would look like.

The 10 mentors experienced a shift in how they enacted and talked about coplanning (Table 2). Shifting from a hit-and-miss approach that assumed learning by exposure, the mentors tried out in practice ways to help student teachers see how complex the process of planning is through thinking beyond the lesson plan, exploring what students walk in with to a lesson, and focusing on what teachers want students to walk out with from a lesson.

### *Observing and Debriefing*

*The practice of observing and debriefing.* At the beginning of the year, many mentors realized that they had a “kitchen sink” approach to observing and debriefing that included everything the mentors could think to share (see Table 3). Leanne explained that she approached debriefing as “It’s just the whole kitchen sink . . . just jam . . . until it’s overflowing.”

*Observing and debriefing as educative mentoring.* After speaking at length about *focused* observations in a MSG session and tasking the mentors to practice it, they returned with a different perception of the practice. As Lauren said, “[Now] I’m very focused on 1 or 2 things . . . and after we have those debriefings . . . I consciously see her making effort . . . to address those concerns.” From our data sources, mentors described three parts of educative observing and debriefing: getting rid of the kitchen sink to focus on one aspect of effective teaching, using evidence to target learning and teaching, and asking questions to elicit student teacher thinking.

*Getting rid of the kitchen sink to focus on one aspect of effective teaching.* Together, mentors watched a video of a classroom teacher debriefing with her student teacher about many ideas, ranging from how small her writing was on the board to how much time to spend on read aloud—the “kitchen sink” described by Leanne. Not only did the classroom teacher discuss too many different ideas, but the mentors noticed that she also did not choose a worthwhile focus related to the long-term goal of helping a student teacher become effective. The idea of selecting a focus that is worthwhile (i.e., lesson pacing instead of handwriting size) influenced Ben. At the next MSG, Ben reported,

I went right back and did an observation . . . I put focus on just one specific topic (creating engagement through provocative questions) . . . It allowed me to look very carefully at just that part of the lesson: how she was teaching. And afterward we were able to talk about it and I was able to focus just on that one thing instead of before looking at everything and trying to talk about everything.

By focusing on the student teacher’s use of questioning, Ben was able to collect data and plan for a targeted conversation about a meaningful area for improvement.

*Using evidence to target learning about teaching.* Angie practiced collecting data related to an element of teaching she wanted to talk about with her student teacher. She began the observation with an interest in engagement, and then realized in the course of data collection that the learning point for her student teacher was more nuanced. In scaffolding a novice to learn about engagement, Angie said to her student teacher,

I wrote down the different engagement methods, and as I was doing this, my focus kind of shifted . . . I came across kind of an “aha” that—sometimes your questions and the response that you were expecting weren’t very specific. And I don’t know if I would have noticed that unless I was really trying to focus on the engagement and your questions and their responding. Like student response *is* student engagement.

When Angie narrowed the data collection during an observation, her understanding of her student teacher’s needs became more refined.

*Asking questions to elicit student teacher thinking.* At the beginning of the year, mentors reported that their talk typically relied on telling and giving advice. Mentors learned to think of key questions and use data to create learning opportunities for student teachers. In a debriefing conversation, Leanne used evidence from an observation and focused questions to support her student teacher’s reflection on the lesson:

Leanne: Okay. Just breaking it down minute by minute. So, that’s our first minute. What did you see as far as what the students were doing as far as engagement in that minute?

Student teacher: In that minute, the only thing that they are doing was listening to me. And then at the very end of the minute, I had a kid tapping the screen.

Leanne: Okay. So, now here’s my next question for you. To get them involved just that very first minute, what are some things that you can do in there?

In this interaction, Leanne focused in on a particular teaching moment to help her student teacher define engagement in action.

The 10 mentors experienced a shift in the way in which they enacted, and talked about observing and debriefing (Table 3). From an all-over-the-place laundry list approach that assumed more feedback equated to more helpful learning, the mentors shifted their practice of observing and debriefing to include focusing on one aspect of effective teaching to improve, using evidence to target learning and teaching, and asking questions to elicit student teacher thinking.

### Analyzing Student Work

*The practice of analyzing student work.* Using data to drive instructional decisions is common vernacular among teachers. Many mentors reported assigning their student teacher to the daily task of collecting and reviewing student homework, or doing this task themselves while their student teacher taught. However, exploring student work *together* in deep, analytical ways was a new practice for many mentors, often resulting in learning for both mentors and student teachers.

*Analyzing student work as educative mentoring.* After analyzing student work with their student teacher, mentors reported ways joint analysis provided opportunities to learn more about students and their learning (see Table 4). Analysis of student work became a routine way to analyze teaching. Judi, a mentor, reported,

I think [student teacher] did that almost every time she looked at an assignment . . . It became analyzing it to the point . . . “How many people missed this?” “This is what we need to go back over.”



**Table 3.** Observing and Debriefing Experiences.

	Retroactive reflection on prior practice	Educative practice in action	Reflection on engaging in educative practice
Ben	I was looking at everything. Anything I could talk about.	For my observation, what I did mostly was I wrote down the questions you asked and then some responses students had.	It allowed me to look very carefully at just that part of the lesson, how she was teaching. And afterwards we were able to talk about it and I was able to focus just on that one thing.
Jean	I feel like having something specific that I collected, was more productive. It wasn't just "This is great."	I recorded one, two, three, four, five, higher order—deeper thinking questions. That was a 15 min lesson. What does that tell us?	I knew I was going to have to watch her teach, but the whole collecting data was something new and something I hadn't thought about before.
Judi	My debriefs are usually all over the place.	When you think about your lesson on factors and multiples—how did this activity help their thinking?	My main focus for the observation was "What was she looking for as a result of the questions and activities she chose?"
Lauren	But when I talked about it with her there was not focus . . . I feel like it was a laundry list of things.	I am looking at student engagement. Did you notice anything about [student]?	I'm very focused on 1 or 2 things . . . and after we have those debriefings . . . I consciously see her making effort . . . to address those concerns.
Sarah	I struggled with . . . having some . . . structure as to how I'm observing or what I'm observing.	[Observation focused on questions asked] It's amazing how just changing a couple words can change what kind of thinking you're asking the kids to do.	[I learned] different ways to observe . . . and then have a conversation afterwards that doesn't feel like I'm judging her.
Angie	We've never watched [videotaped lessons] together . . . I've never sat down . . . and watched it with [student teacher] and noticed things.	I took some notes and . . . instead of writing everything you were doing, I was trying to do my best to chart and do the engagement of things you did. What do you notice about my notes?	I feel like [student teacher] and I had a richer discussion and could analyze data knowing that we were focused on one aspect of the lesson. It allowed for deeper discussion instead of a broader commentary.
Avery	I wasn't as focused . . . I don't think I gave her anything necessarily to put into practice.	When I think about your goal of checking student understanding . . . How are you able to do that?	[Now I] target or narrow certain strategies, put a name to them, make them tangible.
Leanne	I could be the [what] "not to do" person.	I tallied . . . How many sentences for her? How many sentences for the kids? . . . just very focused.	The ability to provide focused feedback helps the intern improve.
Nancy	When we finished . . . I thought, did I let her talk enough? Did I let her ask enough questions?	Did anything surprise you with the pacing, looking at the anticipated times and actual times?	She [student teacher] took ownership of a lot of the learning goals; it made it more comfortable to have conversations . . . because she had already identified that [goal].
Tina	Before, I felt like I had to take so many [notes], so much data collection.	That was evidence that you were really paying attention to student engagement.	We had really concrete data or evidence to look back on, like looking back at a videotape or looking back at student data.

From our data sources, mentors described three parts of educative analysis of student work, including reflecting on instructional moves, figuring out what students do not understand, and planning what to do next.

*Reflecting on instructional moves.* When reviewing student work, particularly if students were unsuccessful at the task, it is easy for teachers to put blame on the students—their focus

or motivation. Analyzing student work in an educative way, however, shifted the focus away from student behavior onto instructional moves made by the teacher. As Judi explained,

Part of that is knowing the reason that these kids didn't do well because of something I didn't do or I did do. And so I kept asking those questions. So what are you going to do? "Well they just didn't listen, or they didn't pay attention" or whatever. So

**Table 4.** Analyzing Student Work Experiences.

	Retroactive reflection on prior practice	Educative practice in action	Reflection on engaging in educative practice
Ben	No data	[Students] could have done the assignment without understanding . . . what a simile and metaphor was, as long as they understood looking for the words <i>like</i> and <i>as</i> .	My intern was able to see connections between the learning goal, instruction, and student learning.
Jean	I know [student teacher] sits and looks at their work, but I don't know how much she really sits and focuses on where their mistake is coming from.	[looking at work of a student] He's the opposite . . . he gets when the minuend is missing, but not the subtrahend.	[Student teacher] had that "ah ha." "They really didn't get it? That's the kid I thought would have gotten it . . ." . . . and she figured out that they were really missing one type of problem more than the others.
Judi	I would do that internally and I would think, "Ok this stinks. I need to teach this again."	Looking at those two papers from two of the piles that we had separated, what do you think each one of those tells about what the student understands and doesn't understand about the concept that we were teaching?	It opened eyes to maybe what didn't get taught very well, misunderstandings, and how we as teachers need to go back.
Lauren	I don't remember analyzing any student work together.	Almost all of them could infer, but when it comes to adding evidence and citing the evidence and being very specific, they still need more work.	At least once a week we have an informal assessment in front of us and we're both talking about . . . where we need to go from here.
Sarah	I mean you can't evaluate their work and not think "Ok what can I do better as a teacher next time?— . . . [but] we were maybe not [analyzing] to this degree."	That's surprising that [student's] writing the wrong things on here. He's flipping [a whole and a part], look.	It was such an "Ah-ha" moment for both of us. There were some unexpected findings. The ones that we thought should have been able to do this, ones we put in the box of "Yes can do" ended up in the box of "No we can't."
Angie	From day one, she [student teacher] . . . sorted it [student papers], all by herself.	[From the student work] I know we need to focus more on multiplying the mixed numbers.	We look at student work constantly together. Think about could we group them differently? . . . And then who needs to revisit things?
Avery	They turn in work, and I put it in my gradebook, and I'm done, and they don't really get the feedback.	So, what did she understand? She understands most of the basic facts. What is she struggling with? Struggling with some of these higher 8 facts.	[ASW] helped inform instruction, which maybe was different than what [our] assumption was . . . "Oh, they got that." "Oh, did they really?"
Leanne	Before, I pulled up the data, we did not do it together.	Maybe next time, we can break that up into two days [learning from ASW results].	[Now I ask], Well do you think they got it? How do you know? And so we're able to say let's use the student work to analyze did these kids get it.
Nancy	We do it so quickly, that you kind of assume, "Oh, I agree, I'm thinking this person is meeting expectations."	What do you think this student needs to learn next if you were to go back and work with him?	It was so eye opening . . . to actually look at all of the student work and realize, wait a second, not everybody is going to need the same accommodations, modifications, for tomorrow.
Tina	We graded papers together, but did we talk about why did I give the student this or what will we do next?	Maybe we need to go back to the success criteria, revisit that.	What am I doing for these kids that need an extra push or that need extra support?

what are you going to do? I think [student teacher is] going to be saying that in her head now: So what am I going to do?

Instead of being frustrated with the outcome of the lesson, this type of conversation pushed the student teacher to

consider *what can I do instructionally to facilitate learning?* Knowing how students responded to certain lessons/instructions, the question became *now what am I going to do?* Judi modeled the importance of internalizing this question for growth as an educator.

*Figuring out what students do not understand.* The experience of analyzing student work provided both the mentor and student teacher with openings to learn and talk about student understanding. Student teachers had opportunities to see that their mentors are still learners, as Sarah (mentor) exclaimed after analyzing work, “That’s not what I expected! How is that happening? What is not happening for this child?” Sarah was troubled when analyzing math homework with her student teacher, trying to figure out what the students did not understand:

Sarah: So they’re not understanding fully which number is the whole?

Student teacher: I think so. Or maybe they just know the name for the whole or part but they don’t fully understand the whole means the biggest number among the three numbers, I think.

Sarah: So somehow they’re not visualizing so this. This is a problem: 8, 9, and 17?

Student teacher: Yes.

Sarah: So they’re not visualizing what 17 is in their head compared to 9 and 8? . . . I wonder if some of their problem then might be just even an understanding of greater than and less than.

Student teacher: Mmm.

Sarah: And how these numbers relate. I didn’t think about that until literally just now.

Student teacher: I didn’t, I didn’t. I think that’s a good idea.

Sarah: But I wonder if that’s part of the problem too. And it’s so hard to make that as a visual for them.

Analyzing student work together promoted a conversation about student learning and analysis of instructional concepts. New ways of analyzing the instructional problem emerged for student teacher and mentor alike when they worked together to figure out why students did not understand a particular concept.

*Planning what to do next.* Analyzing student work should occur with frequency, beyond end-of-unit exams. Student work serves as evidence for the learning needs of individuals, and can help inform instructional decisions on a daily basis—to provide both learning extension and support. Lauren shared after analyzing student work,

What we found was they could all infer . . . but when it comes to adding evidence and citing the evidence and being very specific, they still need more work . . . A lot of them weren’t able to elaborately detail their evidence for their schema.

Upon closely analyzing student work, Lauren and her student teacher were able to dig beyond the surface that students understood the main idea of inferring and get to the root of

the learning need. They then took this information to plan future instruction. Lauren explained,

We came up with a plan for the next one [strategy] to again keep teaching it. Because we usually do a strategy for about a week. And then give them sentence starters . . . Because we didn’t this time. We just gave them a chart and asked them to do it. But this time we’ll give them sentence starters.

Looking at student work closely together helped Lauren and her student teacher consider the supports that were not in place during this lesson that they will include in future instruction.

The 10 mentors shifted how they approached analyzing student work in several ways (Table 4). Previously, analyzing student work had been an activity completed in isolation. More than grading papers quickly, having an implicit internal process, or just putting grades in a gradebook and moving on, the mentors realized the power of having conversations about connections between goals, instruction, and learning, and recognizing assumptions they and the student teacher made about learning.

## Discussion

Traditionally, classroom teachers have been asked to “cooperate” during student teaching, providing advice to imitate and emotional support to solve problems (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005). But merely cooperating does not mean that mentors view themselves as educators who are an active part of helping a novice learn. Educative mentoring, which involves using teaching expertise along with knowledge of student teachers as learners to create learning opportunities, must be learned over time (Schwille, 2008). The findings of this study provided concrete examples of ways in which teachers shifted their practice from cooperating to educative mentoring while participating in sustained professional learning about mentoring.

### *Cooperating Is Not Enough*

The traditional image of a mentor as “cooperating” is problematic, reinforcing that hosting a student teacher merely means allowing space for the beginning teacher to practice (Hall et al., 2008) without providing focused mentoring (Clarke et al., 2014). Furthermore, when a teacher is left alone to learn to mentor, the kind of conversations teachers have with student teachers are often limited to tips and survival strategies (Bradbury & Koballa, 2007; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996). A view of cooperating perpetuates the notion that teachers do not have the capacity or professional knowledge to be able to help another adult learn, and as a result, teachers do not see themselves as teacher educators.

Indeed, at the beginning of this study, the participants saw themselves as traditional cooperating teachers and described their mentoring as haphazard. They identified themselves as cheerleaders whose mentoring was hit or miss, expecting the student teachers to learn merely by watching. Student teachers were expected to understand the reasons behind complex decisions made without access to inquiry together with their mentor (Bradbury & Koballa, 2007).

### **Cooperating Teachers Can Be Educative Mentors**

A teacher's conception of mentoring influences her mentoring practice and, thus, opportunities for learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996). When teachers take an educative stance, they provide growth opportunities for their student teachers and themselves—opportunities that are not inherent in traditional conceptions of mentoring as cooperation (Bradbury, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, 2001b; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). Indeed, over the course of our study, teachers shifted their thinking and came to view their role as that of an educative mentor. This shift happened as these 10 teachers became intentional about the ways in which they enacted common mentoring practices. This shift was not accidental. With purposeful experiences, practice and reflection, educative mentoring was learned.

Just as learning to teach requires deliberate interactions with a knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978), so too does learning to mentor. Just as planning and analyzing student work are complex teaching tasks that need to be learned (Kazemi & Franke, 2004; Norman, 2011), so too are the mentoring moves needed to facilitate the learning of these tasks. Furthermore, learning to provide feedback that is targeted and growth oriented (Voerman et al., 2015) involves study and practice. Educative mentoring is possible when teachers have opportunities to practice, document, analyze, and discuss their experiences as mentors. Teacher educators, whether school or university based, need opportunity, structure, and support to learn this way of mentoring.

### **Concluding Insights**

To promote educative mentoring, targeted professional learning opportunities for mentors that provide both educative learning and ongoing support are necessary (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Findings from this study can be used to develop mentor preparation programs rooted in the experiences of actual mentors. The mentors from this study helped us define the educative practices of coplanning, observing and debriefing, and analyzing student work. These three practices illustrated by 10 mentors in our study can serve as a foundation of what educative mentoring can look like. We present one way to facilitate professional learning experiences for mentors, and this model can serve as an example for other university-based programs. We recommend teacher preparation programs (a) select a practice common in mentoring, (b) define what it looks like when done in educative ways, (c) create time and space for

mentors to inquire into their use of this practice with the support of their colleagues and university personnel, and (d) together reflect on the enactment of the practice. Under this model, mentors and universities can expand their understanding of what educative mentoring looks like together, and how it can positively influence the student teacher's growth both now and in the future.

Further research is needed to investigate how specific models of professional development can prepare teachers to enact mentoring practices in educative ways (Wexler, Stanulis, & Pylman, 2017). Furthermore, research examining how student teachers specifically benefit from working with mentors prepared to enact educative practices is needed (Wexler, 2018). Finally, how does mentor teachers' teaching change as a result of engaging in educative mentoring (Marciano et al., 2018)?

In this study, we looked at formal moments of mentoring, mentoring that occurred before or after teaching. We see a need to learn more about informal mentoring, or mentoring occurring in the moment of instruction. How might this be captured? What can such moments look like when done in educative ways?

We recommend a movement away from mentoring as only "cheerleading," or simply "cooperation" between mentors and student teachers. Instead, we call for a movement toward a conception of mentoring as preparing student teachers for educative experiences through a mentoring process that is itself educative. Teachers should not be alone in learning to mentor, nor should they just be provided with a handbook or a 1-day workshop. Social learning opportunities sustained over time with focus, voice, and analysis helped these mentors feel empowered to make changes in their practice. Our findings contribute to a growing knowledge base of educative mentoring, providing on-the-ground examples of educative mentoring, through the eyes of mentors, that focuses on growth, continuity, and inquiry.

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