

**MENTOR AS "CHANGE" AGENT: EARLY CAREER TEACHERS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF MENTORING EXPERIENCES**

by

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### **Abstract**

With an education system that is facing unprecedented change and disruption, it is crucial, now more than ever, to empower new teachers to overcome the many hurdles and challenges they will face. Mentors can play a significant role in supporting new teachers in their entrance into the profession and preparing them for future challenges. Although there is much research on the benefits of teacher mentorship, less scholarship has focused on defining effective mentorship from the perspective of teachers. This study involved interviews with five early career teachers, investigating their perspectives on effective mentorship. The results point to effective mentoring structures as ones that support and facilitate the building of trusting, collaborative relationships with a reflective mentor who embraces collaborative inquiry. The study gives several considerations to support and empower new teachers and to develop more effective and sustainable teacher mentorship programs, including: mentor preparation and support, mentoring structures that provide time for mentors and mentees to collaborate and to observe one other, initiatives that encourage and celebrate risk-taking, and expanded levels of supports for new teachers such as professional development.

*Key Words:* teacher mentorship programs, teacher mentorship models and practices, early career teacher retention, teacher identity, induction

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Finally, to my family, thank you for all of your love and support. I appreciate your patience with the many evenings and weekends you had to fend for yourselves and your understanding when I was just downright grumpy.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this paper to all the enthusiastic and passionate teachers who are entering the world of teaching. Thank you for choosing this valued profession. May you find those special mentors who will support and empower you to find your way in this profession. I wish you success.

The best thing about being a teacher is that it matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters everyday.

—Todd and Beth Whitaker, *Teaching Matters*

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## **Introduction**

I have spent most of my 23-year teaching career as a science teacher at the same high school. In the beginning, I was happy just being in my classroom with my students, helping them to become educated citizens of my community. I very quickly realized, though, that I wanted to do more for my profession. My kind and caring nature, and my deep desire to help others, led me to my journey as a teacher mentor. After only three years in the profession, I had the opportunity to work with my first student teacher, and it was that experience that sparked my passion for teacher mentorship. During my career, I have worked with 12 teacher candidates. Having the opportunity to work so closely with some extremely passionate and devoted early career teachers has contributed to much of my growth as a teacher, mentor, and leader.

After taking part in my district's Mentor Training Pilot Program, I became even more interested in the skills that enabled the program mentors to support early career teachers and how to improve my skills to better support my new colleagues. My interests led me to join my district's Mentoring Committee. I have worked on this committee for 12 years now, serving as co-chair of the committee for the last four years. I have worked closely with both veteran teachers in their capacity as mentors, and teachers who are new to the profession (0-5 years teaching experience) or new to their assignment and who have received mentorship supports. The time spent with both groups of professionals as they navigated their roles and responsibilities in a mentoring relationship has enabled me to understand the experiences of both mentors and mentees. I have also had the opportunity to become a member of the Teacher Mentoring BC Committee (TMBC), where I have networked with other mentoring coordinators and mentoring support teachers from across British Columbia. As I have learned about current

mentoring programs and practices in other districts, I have been able to bring this knowledge back to my classroom, school, and district.

In my recent district learning services position, I worked closely with the alternate education teachers in my district. These teachers are tasked with working with more vulnerable youth who struggle academically or behaviorally. I had the opportunity to see firsthand the expectations put on these teachers and why there is such a high rate of teacher turnover in these programs. These positions require a significant amount of work, making them less desirable than other positions, and it is often new teachers with minimal experience who take these jobs. When new teachers start these multifaceted positions, they often do not have much guidance and must figure things out on their own. These factors might explain why these teachers are feeling so alone in their struggles. Why, as a profession, are we allowing this to happen?

Unfortunately, I have seen new teachers come into the profession with enthusiasm and innovative ways to help students learn, only to feel pressured to conform to what others are doing. It can be challenging to find one's own identity and try new, innovative practices when hearing, "that isn't the way to do it" or "this is the way we do things around here." This stance is not conducive to allowing teachers the space to find their place and shape their professional identities. I experienced some of this myself when I first started teaching. As I did not know any different, I thought I needed to do what other teachers advised me to do. I have long questioned how to help newer teachers to have the confidence to persevere with their ideas and not become discouraged by the reluctance of some teachers towards new pedagogies. It took me a long time to gain the confidence to try new things and find my own identity, but as I think about how I overcame this, I realize that it was through relationships and collaboration with others who valued the same things. Their wisdom and support were instrumental to my growth and

development as a teacher. When I worked with people I trusted and knew would support me in my learning, I felt cared for and was more likely to be vulnerable and authentic and grow more as a person, a teacher, and a leader. Yendol-Hoppey and Fitchman (2007) talk about the "importance of providing psychological and emotional support to help novice teachers' entry into the profession, keep them there and help them become successful educators" (p.16). How can mentoring relationships provide the psychological and emotional support necessary to promote teacher learning and growth, and empower new teachers to challenge normative practices through pedagogical and instructional innovation?

### **Purpose**

Despite having the basic skills and knowledge to be successful teachers, there are many demands on and expectations of early career teachers. As a result, many feel overwhelmed and lack a sense of accomplishment or success. Why are we not following other professions and facilitating learning for those new to the trade like an apprenticeship? As Danielson (2006) states, "No architectural firm would ask a newly licensed architect to single-handedly design a major building the first week on the job. Rather she would work on a team with more experienced architects" (p.14). Unfortunately, teachers who do not receive support or who do not feel effective in the first years of teaching often abandon teaching for other professions (Moir, Barlin, Gless & Miles as cited in Kutsyuruba, Walker, Makhamreh, & Stroud Stasel, 2018). What saddens me the most is that it is often the most talented new educators, our potential teacher leaders, who are leaving the profession. How can we help support these teachers so that they do not feel so isolated, overwhelmed, and potentially discouraged to try new and innovative pedagogies?

I was interested in learning more about the conversations between mentors and early career teachers, the structures that enable these conversations, and the roles that mentors play in empowering new teachers. Lovett and Cameron (2011) suggest three conditions that positively impact teacher learning: "cultures that promote conversations about learning and teaching, structures that make it possible for teachers to have these conversations, and the roles that more experienced teachers play in hindering or promoting the professional learning of early-career teachers" (p. 90). I believe that the job of leaders, whether they are administrators or teachers, is to find ways to build these cultures, structures, and roles. The purpose of my research study was to examine the perceptions of early career teachers with respect to the type of mentorship that enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice and discover their own teaching identity.

### **Research Questions**

The central question of this study was, "What perceptions do new teachers have regarding mentoring experiences that have enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity?" By learning more about their experiences with mentorship, I was hoping to find some commonalities that would give me insights into what makes effective mentoring structures and which mentorship skills empowered new teachers to be innovative and progressive and do what they believe is best for their students.

### **Scholarly Significance**

Based on my review of the literature on mentorship, I found a gap in terms of what makes a mentor effective and what an effective mentor does in their practice to push mentorship beyond mere support to more challenge, risk-taking, and, ultimately, professional growth. By examining

new teachers' mentoring experiences, I hope these research findings contribute to the limited research available on effective mentorship and the skills that enable mentors to be effective.

Furthermore, I hope that the findings and the recommendations from this study will inform the development and enhancement of mentorship programs for new teachers. By unearthing some of these effective mentoring skills, specifically what mentors do that enable novice teachers to take risks and discover their own teaching identity, this study may guide others in building the culture and structures for more collaborative inquiry between experienced and novice teachers. Exploring how new teachers learn from an effective mentoring relationship provides valuable insight into how mentorship programs can better equip teachers for the very complex and multifaceted mentor role.

I eagerly anticipate using my findings to make recommendations to my district and my colleagues on the Teacher Mentoring BC Committee to help facilitate mentoring relationships that empower novice teachers and foster innovative teaching practices. My explorations into the experiences of early career teachers and the impact of a strong and thoughtful mentoring program will ideally prompt my district to consider changing practices to support both our new teachers and our mentors. Changes that might include creating a mentoring coordinator position which would allow for more concentrated effort on researching and establishing support programs that meet the needs of early career teachers and improve student learning. Most importantly, I hope to find ways to help more early career teachers feel that they are not in this alone.

### **Literature Review**

Good teachers are a critical factor in effective student learning. Among the most significant school-based factors contributing to student achievement and educational

improvement are teachers' qualities and abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hattie, 2003). Unfortunately, with such a focus on teachers' responsibility for student achievement, new teachers are expected to become effective quickly - necessitating that attention be paid to professional development and support of novice teachers. To build efficacy for teaching and help new teachers have a greater impact on student achievement, teachers benefit from modelling by other teachers. One way to provide this is through mentorship.

For many beginning teachers, the reality of the classroom differs significantly from their pre-service training. They come from teacher preparation programs where they have been working cooperatively in close, safe learning environments with classmates, teachers, and faculty, to the common experiences of working in isolation in their classroom silos. Effective mentorship is one way to bridge the gap between being a student teacher and becoming a teacher.

When surveying the literature, three themes in mentoring research appeared: 1) benefits of mentorship, 2) quality of mentorship, and 3) mentorship models.

### **Benefits of Mentorship**

Two common purposes of mentoring programs are to provide support for new teachers as they enter the profession and to pass on experience and possibilities in the teaching profession from more seasoned teachers. Mentoring programs have become commonplace to assist new teachers in coping with the harsh realities of teaching, managing students, and adjusting to the school environment (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Research illustrates the many benefits of mentoring for new teachers: increased retention rates (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011); greater levels of confidence and self-esteem (Lindgren, 2005); increased teacher effectiveness (Henry et al., 2011); increased work

satisfaction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001); improved self-reflection and problem solving (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guarina et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Novice teachers become more effective with experience - with significant growth occurring between the first and second year of teaching (Henry et al., 2011). This research suggests that teachers have a tremendous capacity for on-the-job development; therefore, designing programs that rapidly enhance teachers' effectiveness should inform school districts' mentoring agendas.

### ***Retention***

Comprehensive induction and high-quality mentoring programs have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of new teachers and increase early career teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Henry et al., 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). In the United States, an estimated 20-30% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2001). There are varying numbers on teacher attrition in Canada, but Clandinin (2012) found that approximately 40% of education graduates from Alberta universities and colleges leave the profession within the first five years. Interestingly, some researchers report that the best and the brightest among newcomers appear to be the most likely to leave (Guarino et al., 2006; Henke et al., 2000). While some turnover is normal and inevitable, elevated levels of turnover are both costly to public education systems and detrimental to student learning.

When looking at the different supports offered to new teachers, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found that a combination of supports had a strong and significant effect on teacher turnover. With an increased number of supports came a decrease in the probability of turnover. Research suggests that the strongest factors for teacher retention are having a mentor from the same teaching area (Frels et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), having

common planning time with other teachers (Howe, 2006), and being part of an external network of teachers (Henry et al., 2011).

Several districts in the United States were able to reduce attrition rates of new teachers by more than two thirds by providing expert mentors with release time to coach beginners in their first year on the job (Darling-Hammond, 2000a). These new teachers not only stayed in the profession at higher rates but also became competent more quickly than those who had received no mentoring. This research provides compelling evidence that rather than just focusing on increasing the supply of teachers, the real need is for school districts to develop effective mentorship programs to retain the teachers who have already entered the profession.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Intricately linked to teacher attrition is self-efficacy - a person's confidence in their ability to complete a task, even if it is challenging or difficult. Teacher self-efficacy significantly affects teacher attrition and job satisfaction (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Most teachers start their careers feeling reasonably confident in their abilities to handle the demands of being a teacher but often experience a sharp drop in their sense of self-efficacy during the first year of teaching (Feng et al., 2019). Darling Hammond (2003) discovered that improved self-efficacy due to mentoring helps novice teachers to become more competent and effective at engaging learners earlier in their careers than when teachers are left to figure it out themselves.

### **Quality of Mentorship**

Decades of research has focused on the quality of teacher mentorship and its importance in promoting novice teacher learning. As Darling-Hammond (2003) reminds us, mentoring programs will only produce benefits if they are "well designed and well supported" (p. 9). For

mentorship programs to be effective, more supports that specifically target skills to help new teachers grow professionally should be provided (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

### ***Trusting Relationships***

There is evidence to suggest that the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship has the most significant impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Rippon & Martin, 2003) and that these relationships should be based on trust (Efron et al., 2012; Yendol-Hoppey & Fitchman, 2007). Sharpe and Nishimura (2017) emphasize the value of relationships and argue that "our survival is inextricably linked to the quality of our relationships and our growth and development occur in the context of relationships" (p. 50). Quality relationships between mentor and novice teacher are necessary to promoting teacher learning (Daloz, 2012). New teachers need to feel that they can confide in their mentor; a trusting, non-judgmental relationship with a mentor can help new teachers learn to become reflective practitioners (Efron et al., 2012).

It is equally important that these relationships be based on collaboration, which is strongly tied to teacher learning (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017). Of the three types of distinct mentoring relationships identified by Rippon and Martin (2003), the one described as most desirable in developing an effective mentoring relationship was the 'personal relationship' (p. 215). This relationship involves interactions to fulfill procedural requirements as well as genuine partnerships based on collaboration. Open lines of communication can help build a trusting, respectful, and collaborative working relationship where both parties can be more vulnerable and authentic, ultimately enabling deep learning and growth as teachers.

### ***Skilled Mentors***

The knowledge and skills of mentors can have a significant impact on the development of new teachers. Unfortunately, good teachers do not necessarily make good mentors. Access to a mentor does not ensure that novice teachers will become better teachers. Effective mentors tend to be those who are well-informed about the goals of mentorship and the needs of new teachers. One of the overarching themes from research is that teachers often do not feel prepared to be effective mentors and would benefit from mentorship training (Barrera et al., 2010; Frels et al., 2013; Roehrig et al., 2008).

Quality mentors possess both expertise in teaching and competence in mentoring (Howe, 2006; Roehrig et al., 2008). Many mentoring programs include training opportunities to help build competence in mentoring. To demonstrate the effect of mentor training on the quality of mentoring and new teacher effectiveness, Roehrig et al. (2008) studied new teachers who had both a school-based mentor and an additional researcher-provided mentor. The Classroom AIMS Instrument (Roehrig et al., 2003) was used to determine the new teachers' effectiveness by characterizing exemplary teaching behaviors in the categories of classroom Atmosphere, Instruction/Content, Management, and Student Engagement. Researchers found that new teachers who had both types of mentors scored higher on the AIMS instrument than those with only a school-based mentor. All mentors had received minimal training before becoming mentors, but the researcher-provided mentors received continuous training and support during the year. Similarly, Goldhaber et al. (2020) found a strong relationship between the mentor's effectiveness and a new teacher's effectiveness.

## ***Time***

A common trend that has come out of many studies on mentoring relationships is the importance of having adequate time for mentors and teachers to work with each other to build these productive relationships. New teachers expressed the need for more time to work with mentors to address their many needs as novices (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). In a study done by Hobson et al. (2009), 67% of mentors said that insufficient time was the biggest constraint on their ability to carry out their role, which leads one to question whether it is lack of time that prevents some new teachers and mentors from forming productive relationships. Hobson et al. (2009) suggest a link between providing time for mentoring relationships to develop and the benefits to new teachers. Likewise, Howe's research (2006) found that, globally, the most exemplary mentoring programs included release time or reduced teaching load to allow new teachers time to work with their mentors and reflect on their teaching.

## **Mentorship Models**

There is much diversity in mentoring programs across British Columbia and worldwide - from formal to informal, one-on-one mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring, and mentoring by licensed mentors. Some programs have strict guidelines for recruiting mentors. Others focus on more traditional models of teacher mentorship, where a more experienced mentor shares their wisdom and expertise to support the learning and performance of the mentee (Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017). This apprenticeship model of mentoring is overly simplistic; it focuses on passing on knowledge and skills to novice teachers but does not necessarily prepare them for the complexities of being an educator. Other mentoring programs view mentoring as a more collaborative learning relationship and reflective process that is more intentional and supports the mentee's growth (Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017).

Howe's analysis (2006) of exemplary teacher mentoring programs found some common attributes and exceptional features. Successful mentorship programs include "opportunities for experts and neophytes to learn together in a supportive environment promoting time for collaboration, reflection, and a gradual acculturation into the profession of teaching" (p. 288). Some countries have state-wide programs and spend millions of dollars supporting their beginning teachers through constructivist approaches that expect teachers to practice reflective and collaborative action. North Carolina requires that mentors have a mentor license, shifting terminologies such as "veteran" and "neophyte" to "co-learners" and "colleagues," suggesting a more collaborative environment. New teachers in Germany are provided with a comprehensive two-year internship, while some German states have a phased-in approach that allows new teachers a gradual entry into full-time teaching. Similarly, New Zealand provides new teachers with 20% release time to participate in support activities, and Japan provides new teachers with 125 days of professional development. California has a two-year induction period where an Individualized Induction Plan (IIP) is developed based on the beginning teacher's emerging needs. Each new teacher is allocated a certain amount of money, facilitating release time and reduced teaching loads. Although there are many cultural and systemic differences that need to be considered when other countries are looking to borrow and adapt some of these program elements for their own use, it is still important to focus on what works well, why it works well, and how to incorporate some of these innovative practices.

### ***Creating Challenge***

Another central theme in mentorship literature is the importance of mentors' psychological and emotional support for new teachers. Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Lindgren (2005) agree that mentorship for novice teachers is often focused on the immediate needs of the

mentee and relies on advising and emotional support. While this focus helps reduce stress and addresses immediate problems that new teachers face, it may not necessarily promote teacher development and improve the quality of teaching and instruction. Some mentors prefer to take a purely supportive role and avoid what is problematic (Timperley, 2001). Lindgren's (2005) study found that even though mentors were given some basic training, most mentoring conversations focused more on advising and emotional support than on pedagogical issues. All but one participant in Lindgren's study felt that they had positively developed as individuals because of having a mentor. Still, all indicated that future mentorship programs should include more focus on reflective practice and educational discussions. Lindgren (2005) illustrates the need for better education and preparation for the mentors. The fact that mentees were not aware of their own reflections and the importance of reflecting demonstrates the need for skilled mentors who can encourage and challenge the beginning teacher's thoughts and reflections. Mentoring can be a very dynamic, powerful method for learning and improving relationships, and if done successfully, has the potential for the professional growth of both mentee and mentor.

To push the new teacher forward, the mentoring relationship can move from support and nurturing to encouraging greater risk and challenge (Bova & Phillips, 1984). This move from dependency to independence encourages and challenges the novice's thoughts and reflections (Lindgren, 2005). Harrison et al. (2006) describe what they call "developmental mentoring" as incorporating elements of challenge and risk-taking within supportive environments. Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning further emphasizes the importance of reflection, learning, and experimentation for students and teachers.

By focusing on the mentee's present concerns and questions and not losing sight of long-term goals of teacher development, effective mentors can facilitate even more significant effects

of mentorship. Feiman-Nemser (2001) uses the term "educative mentoring" to distinguish an inquiry approach to mentoring from more conventional mentorship models that focus on short-term technical advice and feel-good emotional support. Through a close study of a thoughtful mentor's practice, Feiman-Nemser (2001) illustrates a type of mentoring that involves mentors interacting with novice teachers in ways that foster an inquiry stance by nurturing skills and habits that help new teachers to learn in and from their practice. Mentors use their expertise and knowledge to gauge the direction that novices are headed and create and support these teachers' learning opportunities. Feiman-Nemser's (2001) findings are instrumental in directing further research into what thoughtful and effective teacher mentors do and how they think about their work. In an educative paradigm, a mentor's role in knowing what new teachers need to become good teachers involves having meaningful discussions with new teachers and facilitating their learning from their own experiences.

### **Gaps in Literature**

Research on mentorship to date tends to focus on the experiences of first-year teachers. Therefore, I saw a need to investigate the mentoring experiences of teachers who had been in the profession for a few years and had more time to implement some of the things that they had learned from their mentors. Even better would be longitudinal qualitative studies that follow new teachers from their teacher training programs through the first 10 years of their teaching development, providing insight into teachers' developmental phases and significant factors that lead to attrition, retention, and development. Knowledge of these developmental phases would foster a better understanding of how to support teachers in the critical earlier years of teaching.

Research has focused more on the presence and benefits of mentorship, particularly retention and attrition rates, and less on other measures of the effectiveness of different

programs. Gaps in the literature on the nature of mentoring relationships include more specifics about what and how new teachers learn from their interactions with mentors. Knowing which mentoring supports are perceived as most helpful by beginning teachers would be beneficial in planning and implementing effective mentoring programs and in determining how to use resources wisely. Little is known about what thoughtful mentors do and how they think about mentoring, so more research into the training of mentors and what makes a mentor effective would be beneficial.

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose**

New teachers' understandings of the education world are socially constructed by their encounters and experiences with those around them. I have observed new teachers enter the profession with much confidence and enthusiasm, only to find themselves grasping to discover their teaching identity. These formative experiences with their colleagues can influence their emerging pedagogies. I was curious about the phenomenon behind the factors that enable some new teachers to challenge, disrupt, and deconstruct long-standing models of education and push against the enculturation that can be so dominant in schools.

By taking a constructivist ontological stance, this study acknowledges that reality is subjective for each of the research participants, and I expected to discover different perspectives of mentoring experiences. By adopting a bottom-up, qualitative approach to research, this study sought to discover these teachers' perceptions of their mentoring experiences that enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice and discover their own teaching identity.

### **Phenomenological Research Design**

Because my focus was to explore the lived experiences of early career teachers, I chose to do a phenomenological study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a phenomenological study "describes the common meaning of experiences of a phenomenon for several individuals" (p. 314). This type of research allows the researcher to focus on describing what participants have in common with regard to their experiences. By looking at individual mentoring experiences and gaining a deeper understanding of mentorship, I sought to discover a universal essence, or what van Manen (1990) called "a grasp of the very nature of the thing" (p. 177).

The phenomenological approach is referred to as psychological or transcendental phenomenology and has 'meaning' at the core (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, the transcendental stance is one "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (p. 34). This research design model oriented me towards acquiring and collecting data that explain the crux of human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The data, or what some phenomenologists call "meaning units" (Giorgi, 2009, as cited in van Manen, 2017, p. 814), that I collected were contained within new teachers' perspectives and lived experiences.

Literature on phenomenology emphasizes the importance of collaborating with participants and building relationships to gain an insider perspective when collecting data. Having worked in the district for many years and in many different capacities, I had the opportunity to work closely with many teachers and establish strong relationships. I have worked closely with veteran teachers in their capacity as mentors and with those new to the profession or new to assignment teachers who learned from these mentors. I have spent time with both groups of professionals as they navigated their roles and responsibilities in a mentoring relationship. These relationships provided me the advantage of being an insider, thereby potentially decreasing the distance between myself and my research subjects.

Another important aspect of qualitative, phenomenological research design is that the research process is viewed as emergent (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This means that the researcher needs to be flexible enough to adapt and alter their plan as needed. It does not mean that the researcher does not go in without a plan, but rather that it not be so tightly prescribed that phases of the process cannot change if required. As I was striving to learn about mentorship from the participants, I made sure I was engaging in data collection responsively, even if it meant changing the original questions that I had planned to ask. To help ensure this flexibility, in addition to my five key questions, I had prepared some possible extending questions that I could ask if needed.

### **Context**

This research study took place in a semi-rural setting in southern British Columbia (BC). The high schools where the participants teach are considered large schools with many teaching staff; therefore, participants were working with several colleagues who were teaching in the same subject area. While these colleagues may provide relevant support and information that teachers in other subject areas might not, this situation could also potentially add to the pressure to conform to what others around them are doing. This study was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that participants' schools were utilizing altered timetables and many new procedures to minimize contact among staff and students. As a result, in-person teacher collaboration opportunities were significantly reduced. It is important to note that these factors may have affected the results of this research as participants were not teaching under "normal" circumstances during the time of the study. Unfortunately, many of the teachers involved in mentoring relationships were unable to meet in person and unlikely to receive the same type of support they may have had during non-pandemic times.

## Participants

Gathering multiple perspectives and meaning from participants is key to qualitative research and even more so to phenomenology. Creswell and Poth (2017) recommend that phenomenological studies involve conducting lengthy interviews with up to 10 people. Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of this research study, I had to set a more practical goal to interview a minimum of five or six participants. As I was looking to see how mentoring experiences enabled teachers to push against the enculturation pressures that can exist in schools, I wanted to interview newer teachers, with three to five years of teaching experience, who had recently experienced the struggle of challenging some of the more long-standing models of education. As a secondary school teacher, I saw this struggle regularly with teachers entering the profession. High schools are much larger and have more teachers teaching the same subject area, so it can be easier for new teachers to feel pressured into doing what their colleagues are doing. It was important to interview secondary teachers from various high schools in the district to ensure that this pressure was not related to just one school environment.

Creswell and Poth (2017) argue that it is important that participants have similar lived experiences of the phenomena under investigation. To ensure that the participants had similar lived experiences, I used purposeful sampling to select interviewees. Since the phenomenon that I was investigating involved mentorship, it was essential that the participants had experienced working with a mentor, whether formally or informally. I sought teachers whose mentoring experiences had enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity. I aimed to identify some commonalities within their mentoring experiences to provide insights into what skills their mentors used that encouraged them to resist the pressure to conform to the practices of their colleagues. Through my experience in the district and my roles

working closely with many secondary teachers, I was able to identify new teachers who met these requirements. Through informal conversations with other secondary teachers and with many of our district mentors, I learned about the innovative activities of some newer teachers. To identify and define the experiences and qualities that permitted and encouraged these teachers to embrace change and innovation, I selected these new teachers as my research participants. An email invitation was sent to twelve teachers to participate in the study, and the first five participants who expressed interest were interviewed. To ensure confidentiality, I gave each participant a pseudonym. The following table provides a few key pieces of information regarding each participant:

**Table 1**

***Participant Information***

| Participant | Pseudonym | Job Description                  | Years of Teaching Experience | Formal or Informal Mentorship |
|-------------|-----------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1           | “Graham”  | Secondary Humanities Teacher     | 5                            | Formal                        |
| 2           | “Bones”   | Middle/Secondary Science Teacher | 3                            | Formal                        |
| 3           | “Peter”   | Secondary Science Teacher        | 5                            | Formal                        |
| 4           | “Emily”   | Secondary Humanities Teacher     | 5                            | Informal                      |
| 5           | “Kyle”    | Secondary Humanities Teacher     | 4                            | Informal                      |

**Data Tools**

Before recruiting participants, this research project was reviewed and approved by the University of the Fraser Valley Human Research Ethics Board (HREB Protocol #100561, December 16, 2020) and the local school board. Once approved, I emailed potential participants an Invitation to Participate. This letter outlined the purpose and procedures for the study, the

time commitment for participants, and the timeline for interviews and member checks.

Participants were advised that their information would remain confidential, and all data would be anonymized before analysis. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, I emailed a Letter of Informed Consent, which they signed prior to their interview.

The researcher is a key instrument within the qualitative research process. As the researcher, I conducted interviews and collected and analyzed the data. It was important that I not just rely on instruments developed by others but also designed my own. Van Manen (2014) argues that "questions need to have clarity, point, and power to ensure that the analysis has reflective focus" (p. 297). Using very few open-ended questions related to the phenomenon of mentoring experiences, I set aside prejudgments and assumptions (see Appendix A for Interview Protocol). I ensured that my open-ended questions were not value or bias-laden and focused each question on the participants' lived experiences. Using interview questions that promoted participants to provide "experiential detail, concreteness, vividness and lived thoroughness" (van Manen, 2014, p. 297), I ensured the experiential quality of the data.

Interviews were conducted between January 4 and 22, 2021, and were 30 - 45 minutes in duration. Each participant received the interview questions in advance of the interview. Each interview started with participants being asked to define the word mentorship. They were asked to describe their experiences working with a mentor(s). Participants were then asked what experiences or interactions enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity (See Appendix A).

Transcripts were sent to participants between January 11 – 30 for their review and to ensure accuracy, and all confirmed transcripts were returned by February 13. Since the interviews were conducted under restrictive pandemic protocols, gathering up-close information

in person was not possible. Instead, the district-supported platform Microsoft Teams was used to meet virtually with each of the participants, and the interview was audio-recorded using the Otter app on my iPhone. Immediately following each interview, Otter was used to transcribe the interview, and the anonymized transcript was transferred to a password-protected USB. At this point, the raw data was deleted from the Otter app, and the USB was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The transcribed data was deleted from the USB upon completion of this study.

### **Managing Bias**

It is imperative in phenomenological studies that researchers consider their own perspectives, beliefs, and values. The researcher should set aside their personal experiences with the phenomenon, take themselves out of the research as much as possible, and allow the participants' experiences to be understood. This process is known as bracketing, and Creswell and Poth (2017) define it as a process where "investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (p. 78). Van Manen (1990) refers to this as a part of "phenomenological reflection" and believes that the process of bracketing, or withdrawal, is important to "grasp the essential meaning of something" (p.77).

In a qualitative study, the researcher is viewed as a "human research instrument" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p. 2) – responsible for designing the data collection tools, conducting sampling, as well as condensing, analyzing, and interpreting data. This view amplifies the importance of being mindful of the biases that come into play when working alone. Although it is impossible to be completely unbiased, I actively reflected on and considered my own biases or assumptions about teacher mentorship at every step of the methodological process. As my own

background and experiences shaped my interpretations, I bracketed myself before the research began and overtly identified my own preconceptions or assumptions regarding teacher mentorship. I wanted to focus on learning about these new teachers' mentoring experiences and the meaning that they held about these experiences and not the meaning that I brought to these experiences. Although I never worked formally with a district mentor myself, I was involved with the mentorship program in my district for many years. I participated in mentor training sessions as both a mentor and someone facilitating the training. Through these experiences, I saw first-hand what many new teachers struggle with early in their careers, and I remembered my struggles as a new teacher very clearly. Unfortunately, I did not have a mentor or anyone to guide me in those very formative years. Instead, I did what many new teachers do, and I conformed to the ideas and practices of those working around me. I do not believe that I found my own teaching identity for many years, as I felt much pressure to conform to what my colleagues were doing. At the onset of this research, I assumed that all mentoring experiences were positive and that these mentoring experiences allowed early career teachers to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own identity. Therefore, it was important for me to manage these potential biases throughout the study.

During the data collection stage and before analyzing my data, I dedicated a concerted effort to examine my biases. I maintained an open mind regarding the participants' feedback and focused on the meaning that they held about these experiences. Moreover, my research questions were open-minded and not value or bias-laden, which further enabled me to manage my own bias. I collaborated with a few of my colleagues on question design and sought feedback from my supervisor. The advantage of taking an exploratory qualitative approach like phenomenology is that I could help to restrict my own biases while gathering in-depth descriptions from the

participants by using open-ended questions. I wrote in a reflective journal, where I made regular entries to keep track of bias, record observations/reflections, pose questions, or note any unexpected findings. Throughout the data analysis process, I referred to this journal to remind me of any assumptions that I made along the way which may have interfered with the objectivity of my findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Before I could start analyzing my data, I needed to manage and organize my data. After recording and transcribing interviews, I reviewed each interview, anonymized it by taking out any names or identifying information, and cleaned it up by removing words such as "um" and "like." Three of the five participants chose a pseudonym, while a pseudonym was assigned to the other two. At this point, the transcript was sent to each participant, allowing them to do a member check of the raw data. This member check allowed participants the opportunity to make alterations, additions, or deletions to their transcript to ensure it accurately reflected their ideas and experiences.

In an attempt to understand the data, I read through each transcript several times. I then started identifying and taking brief notes of ideas or key concepts that emerged. I highlighted significant statements or phrases that pertained to how the participants were experiencing mentorship. Moustakas (1994) refers to this step as horizontalization of data. To keep track of the key concepts discussed by each of the participants, I created a spreadsheet to help organize what was said, by whom, and on what page of the transcript. I created a section entitled "noteworthy quotes" and made reference as to why the quote was noteworthy. By focusing on what was discussed and summarizing the transcripts, I started to identify and classify these pieces of information into emerging codes. Identifying emerging codes was the beginning stages

of first-level descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2014). I noticed several common themes in what the participants had experienced, so I consolidated these ideas into codes, noting the frequency of how often these codes occurred. Upon further analysis of these codes, I noticed an overlap in some of the key concepts and started clustering and collapsing similar codes into broader categories. By grouping the significant statements into broader units of information or "meaning units" (van Manen, 2017, p. 814), I built a foundation for making sense of and interpreting the data.

I grouped the categories to formulate meanings and themes common to all participants. Using these themes, I made detailed descriptions of trends and patterns, which allowed me to make textural descriptions of the lived experience of new teachers through the mentorship process. Using both textural and structural descriptions, I created an overall composite description and an essence of their mentoring experiences.

### **Strength of Study**

Validity and reliability are not terms generally discussed in qualitative research, yet some terms can be used to discuss the accuracy of research findings. The "Triple Crisis," as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), helps to explain the key points to consider when discussing the strength of a study.

The first of the crises described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) is the *Crisis of Representation*, which considers whether findings arise from the participants' accounts or the researcher's accounts. Using my reflective journal and meeting regularly with my supervisor, I was able to check biases and assumptions that might influence data analysis.

I kept the participants as real as possible and did not objectify them. The fact that I had some type of relationship with all of my participants before the study enabled me to describe

them and their context in my study. For the few participants that I did not know well, I asked how they would like me to describe them. By providing descriptions of the participants and not just referring to them as another research subject, I framed the participants as real people with real experiences. I was hopeful that my preexisting relationship with many of the participants allowed them to feel more comfortable opening up to me and to give "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) when answering my questions. By asking participants to define the term "mentorship" in their own words, I indicated I was not putting ideas into their heads to get desired responses.

The second of Denzin and Lincoln's crises is the *Crisis of Legitimization*. Purposeful sampling of teachers who already had experience working with a mentor helped me ensure that the data captured actual lived experiences related to mentorship. Member checks allowed participants to review the transcript from their interview and ensure that all information transcribed was accurate and fulsome. By giving examples of participants' responses to interview questions, I supported the themes that emerged and demonstrated that the data findings were authentic and credible. Having my supervisor examine my data analyses as an expert reviewer provided an outside perspective that further adds to the credibility of my results.

The *Crisis of Praxis*, the third concept that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) ask researchers to consider, refers to how the information gained from the research will be used and how it will benefit others. In this study, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their mentoring experiences and their first few years in the teaching profession. This reflection may assist them in realizing the opportunities for professional growth in teacher mentorship programs and in reflecting on the skills, attributes, and behaviors required to become effective mentors themselves.

## **Results**

The purpose of this study was to explore the connection between new teachers' mentoring experiences and their ability to take risks, grow in their practice and discover their own teaching identity. I was particularly interested in what distinguishes the type of mentorship that fosters and encourages innovation. I was curious to know if there were certain characteristics, actions, or words that allow a mentor to act as a "change agent" and enable new teachers to challenge the status quo in education through pedagogical and instructional innovation.

### **Defining Mentorship**

To establish an initial impression of how the participants experienced mentorship, I asked them each to define the term mentorship at the beginning of each interview. Common to all responses was the value of working with a more experienced and skilled teacher and their mentor sharing their wisdom and ideas. Their responses were unanimous when it came to the role of the mentor in providing help, guidance, and support. Graham, Emily, and Kyle defined mentorship as involving a trusting relationship in which new teachers feel safe and are willing to discuss and share their struggles and concerns. Graham and Emily both mentioned vulnerability when they talked about the courage to admit that they need help and the value in recognizing that they do not have to be perfect. Emily defined a mentor as:

... someone who you can trust to share your good moments and your bad ones, and also someone that you can reflect with and have that reflective practice with. ...who you can have guidance from and just an overall safe space because it is really scary to be a new teacher. Someone who can offer guidance, support, and words of encouragement.

### **Qualifying Mentorship**

When participants were asked to describe their mentoring experiences and what it was about these experiences that enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity, similar themes emerged from their responses. Four themes emerged from participants' descriptions of their mentorship experiences: positive relationships, effective mentoring structures, reflective mentor disposition, and supportive empowerment. Table 2 below provides information about the frequency of the most salient data codes from the interviews:

**Table 2**

***Frequency of Codes***

| <b>Codes</b>                                                         | <b>Frequency across all interviews</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Collaboration/Conversations/Sharing                                  | 49                                     |
| Encouragement/Reassurance                                            | 31                                     |
| Sharing of wisdom and experience/Observing more experienced teachers | 26                                     |
| Support/Guidance/Help                                                | 22                                     |
| Relationship/Trust/Safe Space                                        | 19                                     |
| Highlighting Strengths/Building Confidence                           | 16                                     |
| Challenging Assumptions/Asking Questions                             | 14                                     |
| Encouraging Growth and Risk Taking                                   | 13                                     |
| Don't need to be perfect/accepting of mistakes                       | 12                                     |
| Time                                                                 | 11                                     |
| Freedom                                                              | 11                                     |

***Positive Relationships***

Positive relationships represented a predominant theme in the responses from participants. Many spoke of their mentorship experience and relationship with their mentor as

being positive. Peter felt comfortable with his mentors and mentioned that "they were good at sharing knowledge but also easygoing enough that there was no stress involved with working with them and it just felt relaxed and easy." While the relational components of mentorship can be defined in many ways, three sub-themes emerged within the context of this study that contributed to the development of positive relationships between mentors and mentees: trust, collaboration, and support.

Trust was a prevalent theme in responses from all five participants. Emily described her mentor as "someone who you can trust to share your good moments and your bad ones." As Graham said so eloquently, "There needs to be some level of relationship and trust before a true mentoring relationship can happen because mentorship involves some form of vulnerability." Without taking the time to build that relationship and trust, the many benefits of a mentoring relationship may not likely come to fruition. When reflecting on the relationship with one of his mentors, he commented, "I felt more comfortable to be myself and do it my way ... a lot more trust and freedom." His comment illustrates the value of a trusting mentor-mentee relationship and the impact that it can have on new teachers. Participants gave considerable evidence for the value of the relationship. They expressed the importance of a good relationship with their mentor(s) in encouraging them, allowing them to feel comfortable being themselves, and feeling connected, safe, and less isolated. The willingness of their mentors to enter a relationship with them made Graham and Peter both think that people were investing in their success. Several participants recognized the value of a trusting relationship in their willingness to take risks. "I had one (mentor) where I felt that they had more trust in me, and that encouraged me to take more risks. I felt more comfortable to be myself and to do it my way" (Kyle).

All five new teachers agreed that there was much collaboration between them and their mentor(s). Words like "collaborate," "share," "discuss," "talk," and "conversations" frequently emerged in the data. Three of the participants used these words more than 15 times in a 30-minute conversation. Emily mentioned multiple times how much she appreciated the round table discussions, having someone to bounce ideas off of, and that she felt as though she could ask questions anytime and "engage in a conversation about things that work and why it works." She valued the open conversations where her mentor would discuss instructional strategies that he had tried before and how they had or hadn't turned out as expected. These conversations encouraged her to give some of these techniques a try and see how they would work for her. Bones, Graham, and Peter repeatedly mentioned that they appreciated that they could just sit and talk with their mentor(s). For Graham, the time with his mentor to sit, listen, and discuss allowed him to share where he was at with his growth as a teacher, what his struggles and insecurities were, and what he thought he needed to improve on. This collaboration time made him realize that he had extremely high expectations for himself:

In that conversation, the whole role of the mentor was to slow me down, make clear steps of what success would look like in the next few weeks, take the pressure off of having to do everything at once, and make the experience of being a brand-new career teacher somewhat doable and not giving up your entire life to do it. (Graham)

He felt that this conversation was an "intervention" about having realistic expectations for himself. Bones expressed his disappointment in lost opportunities for him and his mentor to connect and have "good, in-depth conversations." Unfortunately, district scheduled opportunities for mentors and mentees to meet and collaborate were cancelled due to the pandemic, and virtual meetings were not the same as collaborating face to face.

Finally, participants placed considerable importance on guidance and support from their mentor. The concept of support came up multiple times in all five participants descriptions of their mentoring experiences. They all used words and phrases such as "come alongside," "help," "advice," "assisting," "under their wings," and "invested in my success" to describe this support. Peter described his mentors as "very friendly and open and always wanting to help." Emily, Graham, and Peter all identified that they could trust their mentors to share the ups and the downs of teaching. Emily described a mentor as "someone who you can have guidance from and just overall a safe space because it is really scary to be a new teacher." Graham spoke of the mentorship committee as a "kind of wraparound support." He also shared the value of reassuring and supportive conversations during which his mentor took the opportunity to build up his confidence. He recalled one conversation when his mentor had said, "you have a lot of potential and hope in the profession."

### **Effective Mentoring Structures**

Participants identified some key structural factors of their mentoring relationships that were instrumental in their growth as professionals. Time and modelling were identified as common factors that were significant in their mentoring relationships.

The participants felt that time was a factor in the quality of their mentoring relationship with their mentor(s). As Graham explained:

The biggest thing that I've realized is when you're truly a mentor, it's the time that you're willing to give. Someone giving you their time is their most precious commodity ... and it's great for confidence and self-worth.

Participants cited having time for networking and connecting with their mentors as imperative to their success. Graham disclosed how he valued the shared time with his mentor. He and his

mentor made a point of attending professional development workshops together. He saw these opportunities as chances to get away from the day-to-day grind of "doing the same thing over and over again" and have conversations that "start getting things percolating in my mind."

Closely linked to the importance of time in forming an effective mentoring relationship are physical proximity and ease of location. Participants identified that being in the same building as their mentor was a benefit and provided them with more opportunities to meet and ask questions daily. Having scheduled time set aside to sit and debrief with specific mentorship-focused topics was key to effective mentoring relationships. Emily emphasized that "it is just making that time and feeling safe with that person." Without time, it is difficult to build the necessary trusting relationship that ultimately fosters rich, deep conversations that focus on growth and change.

In addition to the importance of time, the theme of modelling was prominent in the interview data. Participants shared how watching and learning from their mentors and colleagues enabled them to grow in their practice. All five participants recognized how helpful it was to get fresh ideas, tips, and tricks from those more skilled and experienced than them. Knowing that their colleagues were trying things and making mistakes as well, and the sharing of successes and failures encouraged the participants to try new things and take risks. Bones felt inspired to try new classroom strategies, which helped him realize that there are no downsides to trying something new. "Just finding out what they were doing, that they took a risk and it worked, encouraged me to take a risk" (Bones). All participants reflected on their experiences as student teachers and having the opportunity to observe other teachers. They wished that as early career teachers, they had more opportunities to observe others, see what an experienced teacher does in their classroom, and ask questions about why their colleagues did or did not do things a certain

way. Interestingly, when asked specifically about what enabled her to grow in her practice, Emily stated, "I feel like part of getting stuck in the status quo, or the rigid frame is that we don't really get enough opportunities to go sit in a colleague's classroom."

### ***Reflective Mentor Disposition***

All participants identified the importance of collaboration and of asking questions and challenging assumptions. Bones and Graham valued the in-depth conversations with their mentors where they discussed common challenges and analyzed ways to improve student success. Bones and his mentor did a book study together, and he talked about how he valued the conversations where they examined and discussed ways to increase student engagement. Graham expressed the benefit of his collaborative partnership with his mentor when he so eloquently said, "A strong mentoring relationship over time becomes more of a partnership, as you now grow with your mentor." This type of relationship illustrates how pivotal a mentor-mentee relationship can be for the professional growth of both parties and that there is much potential for effective mentoring relationships to work towards the common goal of increasing student learning.

Each of the participants expressed the benefits of working with a mentor who is a reflective practitioner and the impact of these types of mentors on the mentee's own ability to take risks, grow in their practice and find their own teaching identity. Participants acknowledged the benefits of sitting down with their mentor, reflecting on how a lesson went, as well as noting both the strengths and areas for continued growth. When things did not go as planned, Peter's mentor would ask, "would you try it differently, or would you do something else?" Emily appreciated when her mentor would remind her to have that reflective practice. If things did not

go well, she felt comfortable going to her mentor and saying, "Hey, I did this today, and it went totally sideways, and I can't figure out why it went sideways."

### ***Supportive Empowerment***

Supportive empowerment emerged as a significant theme in enabling the participants to take risks, grow in their practice, and find their own teaching identity. When asked what interactions with his mentor enabled him to take risks, Graham stated:

I think for me, the instilling of confidence and the reassurance that when I'm trying something new, it's worthwhile and that there's no such thing as a perfect lesson and taking risks is the only way you're going to push your own practice and the kids forward.

Participants who felt a sense of empowerment described their mentors as building them up, instilling and building confidence, and recognizing their potential for growth and improvement. Emily and Peter recognized that their mentors were consistently trying to pull them up, making them better by forcing them to grow. Kyle talked about the reassurance he felt from his mentor:

That was a neat thing, and that definitely helped my confidence and made me think that I do have good things to offer this profession, and this is a good choice for me. That was very reassuring and helped give me the confidence to move me in the right direction.

Interestingly, when participants were asked how they defined mentorship and about their previous mentoring experiences, none mentioned having freedom or autonomy. Yet when asked about what experiences enabled them to grow in their practice and find their own teaching identity, all five participants mentioned aspects of mentorship that engendered a sense of autonomy in them. "Teach to what suits you"; "be yourself and find what works for you"; "try what works for you"; "find who you are"; "find your own groove"; "your own voice" were some of the phrases used by participants to describe autonomy.

Peter appreciated that his mentors valued different kinds of teachers, and that they "never forced me to do anything." They told him that it was his call, and they provided the encouragement he needed to find what worked for him. Likewise, Emily felt the freedom to "figure out what feels comfortable for you," "find who I was," and to "find your groove, find your voice." She reflected on the opportunities where her mentors "gave me little gems to help push me forward, but they were also very much like 'think about it ... and then figure out what feels comfortable for you'." Bones was told to "teach the way that suits you. Don't try to be somebody that you're not."

Affirmation was another prominent theme connected to empowerment. Words like "encouragement," "reassurance," "positive feedback," "pull me up," and "highlighting strengths" emerged in all five interviews and in all five questions asked. Participants discussed these words more frequently when asked about what mentoring experiences enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity. Kyle stressed the importance of affirmation:

... a lot of positive feedback that I'm really good with kids and working with teens, and so that reassurance that I have a natural gift to work with students. I think that reassurance that I had that was very positive and helped me build my confidence and move in the right direction. Just that reassurance that that was something that I was good at... has helped form my identity as a teacher.

Vulnerability was another critical aspect of empowerment. All participants expressed that their mentors were good at letting them know that they didn't need to be perfect, that there is no such thing as a perfect lesson, and that mistakes are alright. As Peter said, "My mentors were very good about making sure that I knew that I didn't have to be perfect." Bones and Graham

valued their mentors, reminding them that experiencing failure for themselves and making mistakes provide more opportunities to learn and grow. Several new teachers saw their mentor's role as helping them realize that they have high expectations of themselves and that they need to be more realistic with their expectations.

A mentor can foster independence and greater professional autonomy by creating a supportive environment that challenges new teachers and encourages risk-taking. Peter reflected on what one of his mentors often told him that made him feel supported:

Just go up there and give it a shot. You're going to learn the things that work as you do them, and you're going to learn the things that don't as you do them, but the most important part is that you're just getting up there and trying and doing your best.

All participants mentioned that their mentors encouraged them to try new things and push their practice boundaries, pushing them forward as educators. They appreciated when their mentors would ask them questions, requiring them to challenge their assumptions. Graham talked about how the beginning of the mentoring relationship was more about survival and learning the tricks of the trade, but then it started to focus on stretching his professional expectations of himself. Multiple times throughout the interview, he discussed how his mentor not only responded to where he was at and encouraged him, but she "started poking holes in theories and asking questions and challenging assumptions and that piece of never really being okay and never really getting stuck in the status quo of teaching." Additionally, all participants recognized the supportive empowerment that came with knowing that if they tried something and it didn't work, there was no harm done. Things might fail, but the chance of them being successful outweighs the risk. Emily's mentor would say to her, "Just go for it, take a swing at it, what's the worst that's gonna happen? You have to come back and explain it again the next day." Bones' mentor told

him, "there's no downside to trying something new." By knowing that his mentor was taking risks and trying new things, Bones felt more confident to do the same, saying "I know that I can try it because they're out there trying it." This feeling was reiterated by Emily several times. She appreciated that her mentor was a risk-taker herself and the reminders that it is good for teachers to try new things. Kyle's comment about receiving "... a lot of positive feedback, especially when I can tell that I did something different that maybe inspired my mentor to look at what they were doing and take more risks too and try new things" is evidence of how a mentor's actions and words about their own risk-taking can empower new teachers to do the same.

### **Discussion**

As a district mentoring coordinator, I often question how to support early career teachers better. How do we design mentoring structures that move mentoring past relationships that focus on survival and emotional support to prioritize reflection, collaborative inquiry, and ultimately empowerment? The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' mentoring experiences, and ideally, to discover how these experiences enabled them to take risks, grow in their practice, and discover their own teaching identity.

The findings of this study highlight the many benefits of teacher mentorship and the components of mentorship that can empower new teachers to disrupt and deconstruct long-standing models of education. In sharing their experiences with mentorship, four salient themes emerged as having an impact on the participants' ability to be innovative and push against the enculturation that is so prevalent in schools: positive relationships, effective mentoring structures, reflective mentor disposition, and supportive empowerment. The following discussion will explain and evaluate these themes, provide implications for further research, and list recommendations for leaders who are designing and supporting mentoring programs.

## **Positive relationships**

Much of the growth and development that I have experienced in my teaching career resulted from working with people I trusted, people with whom I had a strong relationship, and people who supported me in my learning. Through this research, the theme of positive relationships surfaced as one of the most prevalent contributing factors to all five participants' ability to discover their own teaching identity, grow in their practice, and take risks. Participants valued their relationships with their mentors which allowed them to feel safe, less alone, and comfortable enough to share their successes and failures. If they felt that their mentor cared about what they had to say and genuinely wanted what was best for them, they were more open to sharing things. These findings are reinforced by research (Ryan & Hornbeck, 2004; Yendol-Hoppey & Fitchman, 2007) suggesting that supportive, trusting relationships built on open communication are foundational to collaborative mentoring relationships. Likewise, Harrison et al. (2006) report that beginning teachers found a crucial aspect of the mentoring relationship that facilitates their empowerment is the interpersonal skills of the mentor. Growth and development occur in the context of relationships, so quality relationships are necessary for promoting learning (Daloz, 2012; Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017). Teachers thrive on connection with others and "are social beings that grow and flourish when our relationships are intact" (Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017, p.50).

Collaboration, or a partnership of working and ideally creating together, is fundamental to building the mentor-mentee relationship. All participants repeatedly mentioned that they valued collaboration with their mentors and that words like "collaborate," "discuss," and "share" were the most prevalent across all interviews (refer to Table 2 on p. 27). Evidence in the literature review and findings from this study suggests that collaboration with experienced

colleagues significantly influences new teacher development (Fantilli & McDougal, 2009; McNally & Martin, 1998). McNally and Martin (1998) identify the “collaborative mentor” as someone who combines both challenge and support to “empower their novice teachers to engage in learning to teach as a critically reflective process” (p. 47). Support from their mentors allowed the participants in this study to feel comfortable enough to confide in their mentors without the fear of judgment. Building supportive and trusting collaborative relationships is foundational for deep learning and growth. Therefore, relationship building is an important priority in a mentor-mentee relationship. Well-designed mentoring programs provide a framework and opportunities for trusting, collaborative relationships and offer strategies for developing these types of relationships.

### **Effective Mentoring Structures**

Given that quality, trusting relationships are critical for facilitating learning, structuring opportunities for relationship building should be a priority. Three of the five participants had been a part of the district-organized mentoring program and appreciated the targeted times set aside for connecting with their mentors. All participants recognized that time is a precious commodity. They acknowledged the willingness of their mentors to give their time to build the trusting relationship necessary for fostering their growth and development. Similarly, researchers have found that time is an integral part of effective mentoring relationships (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Howe, 2006). Howe (2006) found that mentoring programs that included release time for new teachers to work with their mentors and reflect on their learning were some of the most exemplary programs in the world. Educators will attest to how busy the school year can be and how time passes quickly. Therefore, it is paramount that both mentors and their mentees set aside time in their schedules to meet regularly, whether face to face or by way of an email or text, to

check in with each other. As a mentoring coordinator, part of my role as mentoring coordinator is to remind our mentors how important it is to structure collaboration times into their busy schedules.

Not only was collaboration time with their mentors seen as very valuable, but so was the opportunity to watch and learn from their more experienced and skilled mentors. Modelling risk-taking by a mentor and allowing a new teacher to observe the more experienced teacher's thought processes is also an essential part of a mentoring relationship. Participants in this study appreciated seeing what goes on in other classrooms and being able to ask questions about what they saw. During the interviews, participants frequently discussed that they had many opportunities to observe other teachers as student teachers. They saw this as instrumental in their own learning and professional growth. They also expressed their disappointment in not having opportunities to observe their colleagues once they entered the profession. The importance of opportunities for new teachers to observe more experienced teachers should be considered when establishing structures within formal mentoring programs.

### **Reflective Mentor Disposition**

This study suggests that the skills and disposition of mentors can have a significant impact on the professional growth and development of new teachers. Mentors who valued collaborative inquiry with their colleagues and were reflective of their own practice were able to help instill these skills and mindsets in the participants, which allowed the participants to grow. Collaborative teacher inquiry is defined as teachers who "work together to identify common challenges, analyze relevant data, and test out instructional approaches" (David, 2008, p. 87) and will ideally enhance student learning. All five participants found value in having in-depth conversations and working together to ask questions, problem-solve, and challenge assumptions.

These results are consistent with the claim that there is a relationship between the mentor's skills and that of new teachers (Goldhaber et al., 2020). Working with a mentor who not only modelled their own reflective practice, but also encouraged it in others, had an impact on the mentee's growth and comfort in taking risks. Through reflective conversations, participants were encouraged to review their own experiences, to reflect on their successes and failures, and to determine how they might use this experiential knowledge moving forward. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Sharpe and Nishimura (2017), who describe an effective mentor as someone who can “nurture a relationship that has as its focus fostering capacity building and reflective practice” (p. 6) and who can help the mentee build confidence and competence by encouraging them to reflect on their strengths and wisdom. Having a mentor who values reflection for their own professional growth and development, and encourages it in others, is key to an effective mentoring relationship.

Critical reflective practice is not something that comes naturally. Lindgren's research (2005) found that most mentees were not aware of their own reflections yet were expected to be reflective practitioners. Lindgren argues that it is crucial that we have conversations that explore what reflection is, how to be reflective, and why reflection is important in teaching practice. By providing professional development opportunities that focus specifically on the needs of new teachers, school districts can support new teachers in learning new skills, such as the art of being a reflective practitioner. Learning how to be a reflective practitioner is equally important for the experienced teachers as well. We cannot assume that all teachers value reflective practice or know how to challenge their thoughts and assumptions. There could be benefits to facilitating mentor-mentee learning sessions, where all participants learn the art of reflection and have opportunities to practice these skills in a supportive, collaborative environment.

Feiman-Nemser's (2001) idea of "educative mentoring" focuses on reflection and emphasizes the type of support that better enables the professional growth of novice teachers through collaboration with more experienced teachers. Participants in this study gave considerable evidence for the power of collaborative relationships in giving them the energy and confidence to push forward and take risks. By viewing mentoring as "a process of incorporating new teachers into collaborative professional learning communities" (Feiman-Nemser, 2012 p. 12), I am hopeful that we can shift our thinking of teaching from an independent practice to a more collaborative approach. If we want mentors and new teachers to engage in and grow from co-created learning relationships, we need to teach them what this looks like and provide opportunities for them to participate in collaborative learning communities. Mentoring and district programs can have the power to shift this thinking by providing opportunities for teachers (both mentors and new teachers) to work collaboratively with colleagues and to see first-hand the potential power in such inquiry-focused learning communities. By engaging in cooperative learning relationships committed to forward movement, both mentors and mentees will grow and benefit.

For the participants of this study, it was clear that their mentor's disposition towards their own reflective practice and their ability to instill the importance of this practice in their mentors are fundamental to a working relationship that values collaborative inquiry.

### **Supportive Empowerment**

It is evident from the findings of this study that a supportive mentoring relationship was important to the participants in terms of their potential for professional growth and empowerment to keep moving forward. The type of mentorship that fosters and encourages innovation in education requires a specific kind of support that empowers new teachers, giving

them the freedom to discover their own identity, challenge themselves and the current structures and culture, and take risks. Initially, mentoring relationships focus on relationship building and support and nurturing. The relationship should move towards greater risk-taking and challenge if new teachers are to gain independence (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Hawkey, 1998; Harrison et al., 2006). Participants recognized that although support and affirmation were instrumental in feeling empowered to grow in their practice and discover their own teaching identity, so was having autonomy and feeling safe to be vulnerable and take risks. By encouraging their mentees, highlighting their strengths, and recognizing their potential, mentors could instill and build confidence in their mentees, allowing them to feel empowered. What was learned in this study and reinforced by the literature is that the role of mentor involves considerably more than just a “master of trade” and a role modeler (Hawkey, 1998; Rippon & Martin, 2003). Like many roles, it is important that mentors know what is expected of them and possess the necessary skills to perform this role. Mentor training and support can better prepare mentors and ensure that they have the knowledge, skills, and ability to perform the complex role of supporting and empowering novice teachers.

There is a widespread perception among new teachers that they must teach in the same way as their colleagues. Participants appreciated that their mentors supported and encouraged them to find what worked for them, find their groove, and discover their own voice and identity. They felt comfortable enough to express themselves, which allowed for critical reflection and self-awareness. These findings echo Bova’s (1984) assertion that “adults who work with mentors grow in their own sense of intellectual competence, as well as in their sense of purpose, their feelings of autonomy, and their personal integrity” (p. 16). While it is important for a novice teacher to have some direction with teaching and instructional strategies, it is also important to

allow teachers the space to find their place in the profession and to shape their own professional identities. When teachers feel comfortable enough to express themselves and stand by what they value and believe, this ultimately leads to more critical reflection and self-awareness. By providing mentors with the skills to be encouraging and supportive and push novice teachers to think for themselves, mentors can help new teachers feel confident enough to try new things and find what works best.

The results of this study suggest that if new teachers are to grow and develop and challenge some of the normative teaching practices they may feel pressured to follow, mentoring relationships should focus on fostering and encouraging risk-taking and innovation. Feeling safe to make mistakes and question teaching practices is crucial to the development of novice teachers and veterans alike. Creating an environment where teachers feel safe and where courage is valued will help build confidence and, ideally, risk-taking. Teachers are more likely to discover their learning “edge,” and try something new or outside of their comfort zone if they feel as though somebody is there to encourage and reassure them. Participants recognized the importance of knowing that their mentors make mistakes as well. It allowed them to feel comfortable trying new things. All participants were encouraged by their mentors to push the boundaries of their practice. They felt a sense of empowerment knowing that if they took a risk and it did not go as expected, there was no harm done. The findings further support the idea that a supportive and trusting environment is the building block for challenge and risk-taking, encouraging greater independence and professional autonomy (Harrison et al., 2006; McNally & Martin, 1998). As Daloz (2012) contends, in “a trusting and privileged relationship between a caring teacher (mentor) and the student (mentee), the risk of exploring new ideas is minimized, and the student is encouraged to experiment in ways she might not otherwise try” (p. 219).

Mistakes go hand in hand with innovation and exploration, and so making mistakes only provides more growth opportunities. As teachers, we teach our students that taking risks and making mistakes are beneficial, and likewise, we should be encouraging this in new teachers. Districts, school administrators, and even teachers can encourage and celebrate risk-taking by incorporating strategies like innovation grants. Risk-taking should be seen as a learning experience for everyone, and risk-takers should be applauded for taking a leap.

The literature review and findings from this study suggest that a mentoring relationship can build capacity in new teachers and empower them to keep moving forward. Sharpe and Nishimura (2017) equate the idea of capacity building to that of building a house; there are basic “building materials” needed to progress a teacher’s learning in a forward direction. When I look at their list of basic “building materials,” I see many similarities between these and the categories that emerged from the participants’ mentoring experiences: believing in self (empowerment); strengths and gifts (affirmation/supportive empowerment); commitment (empowerment); willingness to be vulnerable (vulnerability) and engage in the disruptive process of growth (risk-taking); adaptability and flexibility (risk-taking); hunger and restlessness (risk-taking); believing in self, others, possibilities, and opportunities (collaborative inquiry); interdependence (collaborative inquiry); independence (autonomy); taking full responsibility for self (autonomy). The results from this study should be considered when deciding what “building materials” or skills early teachers need to adapt to an ever-changing education world and better prepare mentors to take on the complex role of helping new teachers to learn how to use and develop these skills. To achieve the full benefits of effective mentoring practices, and ideally empower new teachers, mentor training should prepare and support mentors for moving beyond simply giving advice and emotional support to new teachers.

### **Limitations**

Some factors affected the generalizability of this study's conclusions. First, the sample size of this study was limited to only five participants, all of whom are secondary teachers. Since this small sample size only describes the mentoring experiences of five newer teachers, it does not necessarily represent the lived experiences of all novice teachers. In addition, the study was limited to one district, so interviewing new teachers from other school districts in B.C., Canada, or even globally would help assess the strength of this study by providing comparative examples. Also, the fact that I was interviewing participants in the middle of a global pandemic may have skewed the results of this study. Due to the pandemic, we were unable to meet in person, so interviews had to take place virtually using Microsoft Teams. Unfortunately, virtual conversations make it difficult to pick up on non-verbal clues and to have that natural back and forth banter. Third, for most participants, the mentoring experiences they were sharing were from previous years. Two of the participants were still actively involved in a formal mentoring relationship. Given the unprecedented changes to school operations during the pandemic, their mentoring experiences may have been different than in pre-COVID times. District-organized collaboration and connection opportunities were cancelled, and face-to-face meetings were not possible, making it difficult to establish the foundational trusting and supportive mentor-mentee relationship. These limitations need to be considered when determining how comparable the results are to other early career teachers' mentoring experiences.

### **Implications and Considerations**

This research study confirms the importance of mentorship and contributes to the ongoing conceptualization of the characteristics of effective teacher mentorship. Additionally, this research provides important insights into understanding mentoring relationships that

empower new teachers and foster innovation. This study intends to inform the design of more effective and sustainable teacher mentorship programs.

This study developed a portrait of the type of mentorship needed for teachers to take risks and challenge the normative practices in today's education system, where teachers face new challenges every day. Effective mentorship programs help support and equip teachers as they confront a rapidly changing system. Evidence provided in this study suggests that one way to prepare early career teachers better is to design effective mentoring structures that enable the building of positive relationships with mentors who have the disposition to both support and empower novice teachers. Although support and nurturing are essential for beginning teachers to enhance competence, effective mentoring also gradually shift teachers to greater risk-taking and challenge. Supporting new teachers in their entrance into the profession and preparing them for the challenges ahead must move beyond the more traditional mentorship practices that focus on providing support and advice to mentorship that focuses on teacher development and empowerment.

### **Considerations for Mentorship Programs**

Several practical implications and considerations for teachers, administrators, and mentorship programs have emerged from this study. These considerations focus on providing mentor preparation and support, improving mentoring structures, developing cohort models of mentoring, establishing site-based mentorship, providing mentor training for school administrators/teacher leaders, and implementing strategies/initiatives to recognize innovation.

#### ***Providing Mentor Preparation and Support***

Adequately equipping mentors with the tools and skills needed to meet new teachers' multifaceted needs successfully can be invaluable. Mentors need support themselves, as the role

of mentor can be quite complex and demanding and involves more than being a “master of trade” and a role modeler. Structured mentor learning that focuses on developing the mentor’s interpersonal skills, exploring the value of conversations with their mentee about pedagogical issues, and enhancing the mentor’s ability to help their mentee become a reflective practitioner can be beneficial. Conversations about mentoring practice and pedagogy can help the mentor facilitate the mentee’s professional growth and development and prepare them for the many challenges they will face in their careers. Mentors also benefit from opportunities to connect and network with other mentors who face similar struggles and challenges with their role as a mentor.

### ***Improving Mentoring Structures***

If the full potential of a mentoring relationship is to be realized, time is needed to develop a foundation of trust and connection. Mentors and mentees need scheduled time to meet and collaborate and have opportunities to observe one another. Mentoring coordinators should look at different models for supporting classroom observations if finding release time for mentors and mentees to meet and watch each other is an obstacle. School administration or district helping teachers could be asked to help cover classes. Another feasible solution is to video record lessons. The mentor and mentee could then sit down together outside of instructional time or even during a professional development day to watch the video together to debrief and reflect. Inviting other new teachers to join in these collaborative learning conversations would be beneficial as well.

### ***Developing Cohort Models of Mentoring***

While the one-mentor one-novice model of mentoring has many benefits, being a part of a collaborative professional learning community can provide additional opportunities for teacher

growth and development. As teaching is a complex process, it seems unreasonable to assume that one mentor teacher can fully support and meet the needs of the professional growth of a new teacher. New teachers value collaborative relationships, and mentoring cohorts could expand the support and learning opportunities for novice teachers. Grouping new teachers and mentors who have similar topics of interest that they wish to explore through their own practice is an efficient way to form cohorts.

### ***Establishing Site-Based Mentorship***

Considering how important the formation of a trusting relationship is to the mentoring process, and the fact that time is always a constraint, the convenience of working at the same site allows mentors and mentees to have more informal conversations daily or as needed. Working at the same site optimizes the chances for mentors and novice teachers to meet and collaborate and allows more opportunities for classroom observations. A combination of district mentoring programs and school-based mentoring programs could work together to pair or group new teachers with mentors at their site.

### ***Providing Mentorship Training for School Administrators/Teacher Leaders***

Mentorship training can prepare leaders to support and create collaborative school cultures. Training on what successful mentorship entails will reinforce the importance of all leaders playing a role in integrating new teachers into the profession and in their continued growth.

### ***Implementing Strategies/Initiatives to Recognize Innovation***

Strategies or initiatives such as innovation grants by districts, school administrators, and even teachers, which encourage and celebrate risk-taking, can help empower all teachers. By

modelling risk-taking behavior and celebrating risk-takers, leaders and teachers can start much-needed conversations around the invaluable learning that can happen with experimentation.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

After close examination of the findings in this research and in the literature review, it is evident that several areas could benefit from further analysis. More research into B.C. teachers' mentoring experiences is warranted, as there is minimal research from this province and somewhat limited studies across Canada. Most research to date has investigated the experiences of first-year teachers. Longitudinal studies would provide a better understanding of the developmental phases of early career teachers and how to support them better as they navigate these phases.

Research that focuses on the role of mentors in helping early career teachers to negotiate a new identity within the teaching profession is also necessary. Practitioners could benefit from learning more about the kinds of mentoring new teachers receive and how critical this is if new teachers want to shape their practices differently from those they see around them in schools. Additional research to identify what mentoring skills will help mentors facilitate this culture of change and innovation is needed.

Further investigations into the effectiveness of mentors would provide valuable insight into how better to prepare teachers for the very complex role of mentor. It would be useful to extend the current findings by interviewing mentors to gather more details on their dispositions and what they do as mentors to build trusting, collaborative relationships with their mentees and empower them to take risks. In addition, more studies that explore the specifics of what and how new teachers learn from their mentoring relationships would go a long way in better designing mentoring programs and facilitating mentor training.

### **Final Thoughts**

This research study confirms the importance of mentorship and contributes to the ongoing conceptualization of good teacher mentorship. More specifically, this research provides important insights into understanding mentoring relationships that can empower new teachers and encourage them to be innovative in their practice. Data collected from this study, and future academic research, may help shape effective and sustainable mentorship program design in the future.

The current global pandemic has brought to the forefront the importance of having teachers who are flexible, adaptable, and able to meet the challenges of working in a system of unprecedented change. This research study presents some of the qualities of mentorship needed for teachers to take risks and challenge the normative practices in today's education system. Effective mentorship programs will help support and equip teachers as they continue to face rapidly changing teaching conditions.

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## Appendix A

### Ethics Approval

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#### Human Research Ethics Board - Certificate of Ethical Approval

**HREB Protocol No:** 100561

**Principal Investigator:** Ms. Linda Zenzen

**Team Members:** Ms. Linda Zenzen (Principal Investigator)

Dr. Joanne Robertson (Supervisor)

Dr. Sheryl MacMath (Course Instructor)

**Title:** Mentor as Change Agent: Examining Mentoring Experiences

**Department:** Faculty of Professional Studies\Teacher Education

**Effective:** December 16, 2020

**Expiry:** December 15, 2021

The Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) has reviewed and approved the ethics of the above research. The HREB is constituted and operated in accordance with the requirements of the UFV Policy on Human Research Ethics and the current Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2).

The approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Approval is for one year. A Request for Renewal must be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date.
3. Modifications to the approved research must be submitted as an Amendment to be reviewed and approved by the HREB before the changes can be implemented. If the changes are substantial, a new request for approval must be sought. \*An exception can be made where the change is necessary to eliminate an immediate risk to participant(s) (TPCS2 Article 6.15). Such changes may be implemented but must be reported to the HREB within 5 business days.
4. If an adverse incident occurs, an Adverse Incident Event form must be completed and submitted.
5. During the project period, the HREB must be notified of any issues that may have ethical implications.
- \*NEW 6. A Final Report Event Form must be submitted to the HREB when the research is complete or terminated.

\*\*Please submit your Research Continuity Plan to REGS@ufv.ca before beginning your research. The plan can be found here: <https://www.ufv.ca/research/>

Thank you, and all the best with your research.

**UFV Human Research Ethics Board**

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Introduction**

Thanks so much for agreeing to participate in my research study. I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me and share your experiences as a new teacher. This interview shouldn't take longer than an hour. I will be audio-recording the interview using the "Otter" app on my phone. You previously provided permission for me to record this interview. Are you still comfortable with this?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without fear of consequences. Should you choose to withdraw during the interview, let me know, and I will stop the interview. If you decide to withdraw once we are done, feel free to email or phone me. If you choose to withdraw, none of the data or information will be used but destroyed.

I previously provided you with my key questions, but I may ask you supplemental questions if I need more clarity on what you are saying. There are no right or wrong answers, so please just answer openly and share your personal experiences. Take your time to think about the question and answer when you are ready.

#### **Key questions**

1. Define in your own words what the word "mentorship" means.
2. Describe your previous experiences working with a mentor(s).

#### ***Possible extending questions***

i) If they only talk about positive experiences, I will ask them if they had any negative experiences and vice versa.

ii) If they didn't talk about whether their mentor was a teacher in the same teaching area as themselves, ask about this.

iii) If their mentor is in the same teaching area, ask them if they think this was a key aspect of their successful mentoring relationship?

3. Which experiences/interactions with your mentor(s) enabled you to take risks as a new teacher?
4. Which experiences/interactions with your mentor(s) enabled you to grow in your practice?
5. Which experiences/interactions with your mentor(s) enabled you to discover your own teaching identity?

## **Conclusion**

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance, and thus I will not be using your name or any identifying information in my analysis. Your responses will be confidential, and your name will never appear in any reports or publications. To anonymize the data, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name. Is there a pseudonym that you would like me to use? If not, I can pick one for you.

To let you know what will happen next, I will use the audio-recording and the Otter app to transcribe the conversation into text. Once I have had a chance to read it over and fix any mistakes, I will send you a copy to look over. Please feel free to make any alterations, additions, or deletions. If there was something that you didn't mention during the interview but thought of afterward, please feel free to add it. I ask that you return your edited transcript to me by March 1, 2021.

The data will be fingerprint and password-protected, and your original voice and video recorded interview will be destroyed once you have approved the transcription. These measures will help to ensure your privacy. Any raw data will be destroyed within six months of this interview.

Do you have any questions for me before we finish?

Thanks again for taking the time to meet with me and share your mentoring experiences.