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**Building personal and relational readiness for collaborative teacher mentoring through the intellectual virtues**

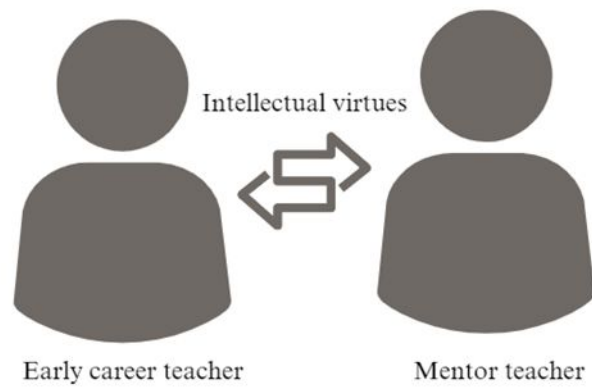
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**TABLE 1**

*Table 1.* Intellectual virtues in the context of mentoring (adapted from Baehr, 2013, 2015; Larsen, Curtis *et al.*, 2023).

<b>Intellectual virtues</b>	<b>Both mentors and ECTs must be prepared to ...</b>
Curiosity	Ask authentic questions, wonder about the mentoring topic and what each other is sharing.
Autonomy	Generate independent ideas and opinions about the topic of the mentoring conversation.
Humility	Acknowledge when they do not know about aspects of the topic of the mentoring conversation.
Attentiveness	Focus, listen and remain present in the mentoring conversation; set aside distractions that may take away from the quality of the conversation.
Carefulness	Check their own and their mentoring partner's ideas for accuracy as the conversation progresses; stay alert for misconceptions or assumptions.
Thoroughness	Seek deeper information and understanding about ideas raised during the conversation; draw on their own expertise and that of their mentoring partner to dig into ideas and issues.
Open-mindedness	Consider alternative ideas to the ones that feel comfortable and familiar to them.
Courage	Share their ideas, thoughts and experiences even when they feel that their mentoring partner may think differently or when they feel vulnerable.
Tenacity	Persist through a cognitive challenge or when topics or issues seem difficult to solve.

**FIGURE 1**

*Figure 1* Mutual deployment of intellectual virtues during mentoring

(Figure is property of authors)

FIGURE 3

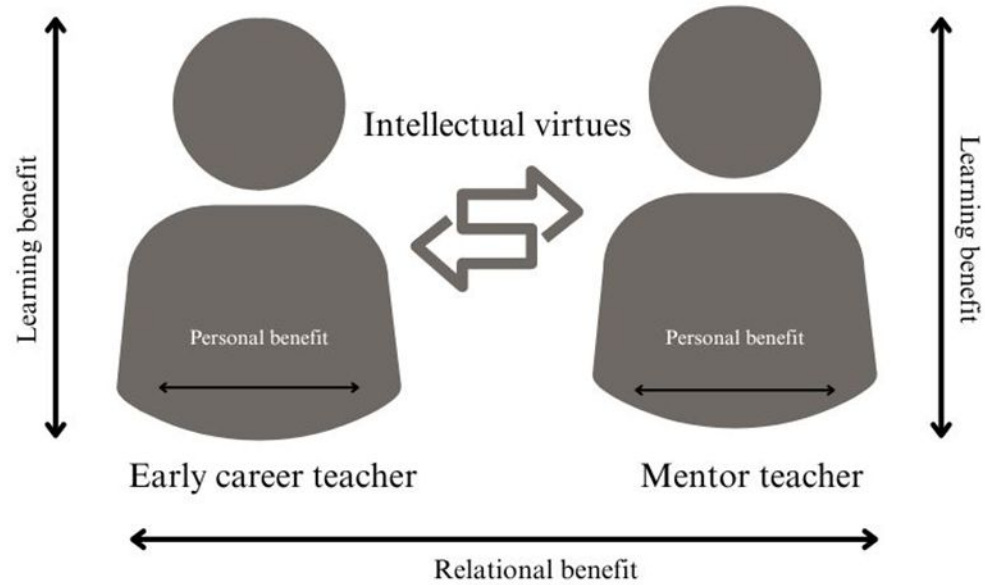


Figure 3 Intellectual virtues and mentoring

(Figure is property of authors)

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4 **Building personal and relational readiness for collaborative teacher**  
5 **mentoring through the intellectual virtues**  
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## Building personal and relational readiness for teacher mentoring through the intellectual virtues

### Abstract

**Purpose:** Contemporary early career teacher (ECT) mentoring approaches have largely aspired to shift towards a more non-hierarchic and mutually beneficial learning partnership approach. Such mentoring can be challenging to achieve. We report on a project that sought to further understand how intellectual virtues, such as intellectual courage, open-mindedness and humility, may be mobilised to prepare ECTs and mentors for more collaborative mentoring conversations.

**Design:** Using qualitative case study research design, we collected data from 31 mentors and ECTs across two states in Australia engaged in professional learning focused on developing mentors' and ECTs' understanding of intellectual virtues as a resource for mentoring conversations. Data were generated from online professional learning activities, a questionnaire, and field notes from school site visits and thematically analysed.

**Findings:** ECTs and mentors reported an increased self-awareness of their dispositional strengths and limitations and heightened confidence to engage in conversations that were more equal and open. Teachers perceived the deployment of intellectual virtues for mentoring to have personal, relational, and learning benefits.

**Originality:** Numerous mentoring studies have espoused the value of mentoring that takes a co-constructivist and deeply relational approach, yet there is limited guidance provided to teachers as to how such an approach may be achieved. This paper innovatively draws on intellectual virtues as a cognitive construct to explore this issue and makes an empirical contribution to understanding how to prepare mentors and early career teachers for non-hierarchical and relational mentoring conversations.

**Keywords:** mentoring; early career teachers; mentors; intellectual virtues; non-hierarchic; collaborative mentoring, professional learning.

**Paper type:** Research paper

## Introduction

Teachers' work is being rapidly reshaped by global events (Towers *et al.*, 2023), politically driven reform agendas (Mockler and Stacey 2021), educational research, and the constant influence of societal and technological change (Loughran and Menter 2019). "Challenges of both recruitment to and retention in the profession are the subject of an increasing number of studies that are shedding light on an array of contributing factors" (la Velle 2023, p. 177), and mentoring as a mode of professional support must evolve to assist teachers to meet not only the demands of the work they face today but the challenges they will face in the future (Aderibigbe *et al.*, 2022). Teachers need to feel that they are not only supported but equipped to meet these challenges (Whalen *et al.*, 2019). We argue that this challenging environment for early career teachers (ECTs) in the first five years of teaching, and their mentors, requires a new approach to mentoring that explicitly develops the kinds of cognitive dispositions and partnership capabilities essential for meeting both current and future demands in the profession.

Contemporary ECT mentoring approaches have largely aspired to shift towards a more non-hierarchic and mutually beneficial learning partnership approach (Robson and Mtika, 2017; Stanulis *et al.*, 2019; Zachary and Fain, 2022). Whereas traditional hierarchical models position mentors as experts and ECTs as more passive recipients of their advice (Burger *et al.*, 2021), current research notes the value of moving towards a collaborative, co-learning approach in which both the mentor and the ECT are actively engaged as co-contributors to the learning experience. For example, educative mentoring studies have reported on the deep and active learning afforded both ECTs and mentors as they co-reflect on practice (Trevethan and Sandretto, 2017). Other studies have shown the positive relational and pedagogical outcomes of mentoring approaches that involve collaborative or co-inquiry into practice (Gallo-Fox and

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2  
3 Scantlebury, 2016; Michailidi and Stavrou, 2021). In these mentoring experiences,  
4  
5 ECTs and mentors must be able to recognise, value and leverage their own personal and  
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7 professional contributory power as well as that of their mentoring partner.  
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10 This reimagined mentoring is a highly personal and relational process that can  
11  
12 be challenging to achieve (Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2020) without the necessary skills  
13  
14 and dispositions. While some studies have shown that mentors are aware of the benefits  
15  
16 of a more collaborative approach and, further, have an appetite to work in these ways  
17  
18 (Curtis *et al.*, 2024), there is a body of research indicating that mentors may still be  
19  
20 challenged to work in ways that move beyond hierarchical models of mentoring  
21  
22 (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021). Further, other studies have identified that ECTs may  
23  
24 also find the shift to equal positioning in the mentoring relationship difficult due to  
25  
26 traditional conceptions of mentoring and inherent deference to the mentor as the teacher  
27  
28 with greater experience and assumed expertise (Curtis *et al.*, 2024). Supporting teachers  
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30 to make this shift is therefore important.  
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36 In this project, we investigated the potential for professional learning about  
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38 intellectual virtues (Baehr, 2013; Jayawickreme and Fleeson, 2022), such as intellectual  
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40 courage, open-mindedness, humility and curiosity, to prepare ECTs and mentors for  
41  
42 *non-hierarchical and collaborative mentoring conversations*. Theoretically framed as the  
43  
44 underpinning learning dispositions essential to lifelong learning (Baehr, 2013;  
45  
46 Jayawickreme and Fleeson, 2022), we argue that these intellectual virtues can promote  
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48 mentoring conversations that prioritise rich, shared and respectful learning partnerships  
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50 (Robson and Mtika, 2017; Stanulis *et al.*, 2019).  
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55 In this paper, we report on findings from a larger mentoring project undertaken  
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57 in 2022. Thirty-one ECTs and mentors from two independent schools across two states  
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59 in Australia engaged in four online workshops and follow-up school visits that focused  
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3 on developing mentors' and ECTs' understanding of intellectual virtues as a  
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5 dispositional and cognitive resource for mentoring conversations. Data collected during  
6  
7 these professional learning workshop activities, school visit field notes and a post-  
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9 professional learning questionnaire were thematically analysed to respond to the  
10  
11 following research question:  
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15 How might intellectual virtues support teachers' preparedness for non-hierarchic  
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17 and collaborative mentoring conversations?  
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20 In the sections that follow, we first review the relevant literature for this study.  
21  
22 Next, intellectual virtues as the theoretical underpinning for this work are outlined  
23  
24 within the context of this research, followed by a description of the methods of data  
25  
26 collection and analysis used. Findings are then presented and discussed. This paper  
27  
28 concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study for policy, practice and  
29  
30 future research.  
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### 33 34 **Mentoring as a learning partnership**

35  
36 Mentoring has become a globally adopted approach to professional learning and support  
37  
38 for ECTs (Squires, 2019). Providing both personal and professional support for teachers  
39  
40 early in their teaching careers (Shanks *et al.*, 2022), mentoring has been specifically  
41  
42 shown to build pedagogical and reflective capacity (Attard Tonna *et al.*, 2017; Crutcher  
43  
44 and Naseem, 2016) and encourage ECTs to explore and experiment with practice  
45  
46 (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014). Mentoring assists ECTs in understanding the teaching and  
47  
48 learning context and nurtures their sense of belonging and well-being (Squires, 2019).  
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51  
52 While many researchers argue that mentoring is more than being an "emotional  
53  
54 cheerleader" (Stanulis *et al.*, 2019, p. 567), a holistic approach to mentoring seeks to  
55  
56 "intertwine the professional with the personal, and bring together the aesthetic,  
57  
58 intellectual, and moral in supporting beginning teachers" (Goodwin *et al.*, 2023, p. 707).  
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3 Research has also demonstrated the mutual benefits of mentoring for mentors  
4 themselves. For example, Walters *et al.* (2020) found that mentoring was considered a  
5 valued professional learning opportunity by teacher mentors, with other studies  
6 reporting that improvements in practice were experienced by mentors alongside their  
7 mentees (see, for example, Willis *et al.*, 2019). Opportunities to reflect on accumulated  
8 experiences, knowledge and assumptions with another colleague, even if less  
9 experienced, have been shown to encourage “professional re-evaluation” (Walters *et al.*,  
10 2020, p. 22) and rejuvenate career motivations (Bressman *et al.*, 2018). Gul *et al.* (2019)  
11 go further to state that being a mentor “is a vital component of teacher leader  
12 development” (p. 2), building leadership skills for future educational leadership  
13 aspirations.

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29 The mutuality of mentoring benefits to mentors and ECTs is grounded in  
30 mentoring that is collaborative, co-constructed and respectfully relational, with learning  
31 framed as a mutually beneficial partnership (Larsen, Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). In contrast,  
32 traditional approaches are uni-directional and see the mentor “guide their protégé  
33 through the necessary transitions that are part of learning how to be effective educators  
34 and career-long learners” (Sweeney, 2008, p. 2). Pennanen *et al.* (2020) therefore call  
35 attention to “a paradigm shift [that] has taken place from the metaphor of knowledge  
36 transmission to knowledge construction, collaborative meaning making and common  
37 creation of professional knowledge” (p. 355). According to Goerisch *et al.* (2019), this  
38 shift requires disruption to the “traditional mentoring relationship rooted in power and  
39 hierarchy into a more democratic, empowering model” (p. 1740) changing the roles of  
40 and expectations on mentors and ECTs (Pennanen *et al.*, 2020).

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The presentation of approaches such as educative mentoring (Langdon and  
Ward, 2015), peer mentoring (Kupila and Karila, 2019), group mentoring (Shields and

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3 Murray, 2017), and co-inquiry (Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury, 2016; Michailidi and  
4  
5 Stavrou, 2021) have all gone some way to advancing more non-hierarchical mentoring  
6  
7 models that value equitable co-contribution and reciprocity of benefit (Larsen, Jensen-  
8  
9 Clayton *et al.*, 2023). For example, educative mentoring is underpinned by the  
10  
11 “importance of collaborative, co-constructivist approaches to mentoring to build  
12  
13 teachers’ knowledge-of-practice” (Langdon and Ward, 2015, p. 241). Researchers  
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15 Beutel *et al.* (2017) and others (Willis *et al.*, 2019) espouse mentoring “as an  
16  
17 interpersonal relationship for professional support based on a process of collaborative  
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19 inquiry” (Beutel *et al.*, 2017, p. 167). Peer group mentoring (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2015) and  
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21 reciprocal mentoring (Paris, 2013) further focus on the value of “reciprocal dialogue  
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23 among equals” (Heikkinen *et al.*, 2018, p. 8), with the goal being mutuality of benefit.  
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25 These approaches, though offering different pathways to mentoring, are underpinned by  
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27 a common valuing of partnership.  
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34 Importantly, researchers have noted the challenge of achieving these kinds of  
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36 mentoring relationships (Robson and Mtika, 2017; Stanulis *et al.*, 2019). Stanulis *et al.*  
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38 (2019) found that mentor teachers may find it difficult to move away from traditional  
39  
40 approaches of mentoring whereby they are positioned as the experts. In some cases, a  
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42 lack of professional learning and appropriate training for mentors has been identified as  
43  
44 a key obstacle (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Furthermore, contemporary mentors may  
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46 find themselves tasked with a more compliance-driven mentoring focus underpinned by  
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48 teacher standards and external requirements for ECT registration (Larsen, Curtis *et al.*,  
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50 2023; Kemmis *et al.*, 2014) or national mentoring standards (Murtagh *et al.*, 2024).  
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52 Curtis *et al.* (2024) found that while mentors may agree with a more non-hierarchical  
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54 approach to mentoring in principle, their practice does not necessarily align with these  
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56 sentiments. Furthermore, Curtis *et al.* (2024) and others (Hobson, 2017; Larsen and  
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Allen, 2023) have noted that ECTs may be reticent to participate in ways that could reveal vulnerabilities in their practice, thus compromising their openness, or be construed as lacking the professional humility expected of a novice professional.

Despite the espoused benefits of engaging in a shared and co-constructive approach to mentoring, little guidance has been offered to mentors on how to achieve this shift (Bullough, 2012) and even less has been offered to ECTs (Curtis *et al.*, 2024; Larsen, Nguyen *et al.*, 2023; Taylor and Black, 2018). Research has determined that collaborative and non-hierarchic mentoring experiences are more likely when mentors and mentees engage in mutual positioning, engaging the kind of intellectual (cognitive), intrapersonal (personality) and interpersonal (relational) dispositions (Fonseca-Chacana, 2019) that provoke “reciprocal, respectful and responsive relationships to enhance the professional development of mentors and mentees” (Quinones *et al.*, 2020, p. 340).

While there have been many studies investigating the importance of intrapersonal (Hudson and Hudson, 2018) and interpersonal (Beutel *et al.*, 2017; Fullick-Jagiela *et al.*, 2015; Heikkinen *et al.*, 2018) dispositions to mentoring, the role of intellectual virtues as cognitive dispositions has been largely overlooked. This study seeks to address this limitation and considers how equipping teachers in the role of mentors and mentees with a knowledge of intellectual virtues and how they may be applied in mentoring might assist in bolstering confidence and capacity to engage in non-hierarchic, shared, co-contributory and mutually beneficial mentoring experiences.

### **Intellectual virtues and mentoring**

The intellectual virtues (Table 1) are cognitive dispositions that underpin learning (Baehr, 2013, 2015). In this study, we innovatively apply intellectual virtues as a frame for mentoring that can facilitate learner flourishing (Heersmink, 2018) and provide essential dispositions for the transformative and relational flow of ideas between the self

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2  
3 and others (Kegan, 1982). These nine virtues, such as intellectual curiosity, autonomy  
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5 and open-mindedness, are focused on ways of thinking as learners and therefore apt in a  
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7 mentoring context.  
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9  
10 **INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

11 *Table 1.* Intellectual virtues in the context of mentoring (adapted from Baehr, 2013,  
12  
13 2015; Larsen, Curtis *et al.*, 2023).  
14

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16  
17 In this study, we sought to understand how professional learning about  
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19 intellectual virtues might prepare both ECTs and mentors with an understanding of  
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21 dispositions that are needed in creating mutually respectful and beneficial learning  
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23 experiences (see Figure 1). Smith (2023) celebrates the opportunity that the use of  
24  
25 intellectual virtues provides within social learning contexts, whereby intellectual  
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27 courage, curiosity, open-mindedness and tenacity can stimulate and nurture inquiry,  
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29 debate and evaluation of co-constructed ideas as well as deep individual “intellectual  
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31 deliberations” (Smith, 2023). In the context of the present study, intellectual virtues are  
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33 deployed as a way of personally and relationally preparing for robust, respectful and  
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35 courageous mentoring conversations from which mentors and ECTs can mutually  
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37 benefit.  
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42 **INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

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45 *Figure 1.* Mutual deployment of intellectual virtues during mentoring  
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48 **Method**

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50 In 2022, four independent schools in Queensland and two schools in New South Wales,  
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52 Australia, participated in a larger exploratory Future-focused Mentoring (FfM) project  
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54 that sought to reimagine teacher mentoring. Independent schools in Australia are those  
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56 that are not part of any state or Catholic diocesan system of schooling and represent a  
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58 diverse set of contexts and philosophical, pedagogical and faith affiliations. Participants  
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3 came from schools from rural through to metropolitan settings, and low to high socio-  
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5 economic contexts. Participants were recruited following ethics approval from the  
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7 relevant university Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Ethics approval  
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9 number ETH2021-0176) via email to their schools. Three of the participating schools  
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11 did not have a formal mentoring program in place before their involvement in the  
12  
13 project, and only one-third of the participants had been in a mentoring relationship for  
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15 over six months. The number of participating teachers from each school varied,  
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17 depending on the number of ECTs on staff at that time. The aspect of this project  
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19 reported on in this paper pertains to the introduction of intellectual virtues, responding  
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21 to the following research question:  
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25  
26 How might intellectual virtues support teachers' preparedness for non-  
27  
28 hierarchic and collaborative mentoring conversations?  
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30  
31 Participating teachers (n = 31) worked in school-based mentoring pairs that were  
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33 either already in existence or organised at the school level for the project. These  
34  
35 teachers were either mentors (n = 14) or ECTs (n = 17), and participants included  
36  
37 teachers from both the primary (Prep–Year 6) and secondary (Years 7–12) contexts of  
38  
39 the school. Mentors ranged in the number of years of mentoring experience from one to  
40  
41 eight years, and ECTs included those in their first (n = 8), second (n = 5), third (n = 3),  
42  
43 and fourth (n = 1) years of teaching.  
44  
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46  
47 Across three two-hour after-school online professional learning sessions, the  
48  
49 research team introduced intellectual virtues and how they might be used within a  
50  
51 mentoring conversation. Significant to this learning was that both mentors and ECTs  
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53 attended together to ensure that both mentoring partners could develop these  
54  
55 understandings. During these sessions, mentors and ECTs engaged in a range of  
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3 individual, paired and small-group activities with Padlets (a digital collaboration tool)  
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5 used to gather anonymous participant responses. Activities included:

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8 1. A self-audit of intellectual virtues: participants were asked to reflect on the  
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10 extent to which they felt they engaged each of the virtues when participating  
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12 in a mentoring conversation. For example, they considered how likely they  
13  
14 were to “acknowledge when they do not know about aspects of the topic of  
15  
16 the mentoring conversation” (intellectual humility) or “consider alternative  
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18 ideas to the ones that feel comfortable and familiar to them” (open-  
19  
20 mindedness).  
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- 23  
24 2. An observation of a mentoring conversation from the perspective of  
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26 intellectual virtues (as demonstrated by the mentor and ECT), followed by a  
27  
28 discussion of the impact on learning possibilities and the mentoring  
29  
30 relationship.  
31  
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- 33  
34 3. Application of intellectual virtues to reimagine a mentoring conversation.

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36 The location of the response on the Padlet indicated whether the response was that of a  
37  
38 mentor or ECT. Following professional learning, each school was contacted by a  
39  
40 member of the research team for a follow-up visit. This was conducted face to face,  
41  
42 either at the school site (n = 3); or via the Zoom platform (n = 3). Field notes (coded as  
43  
44 R1 – Researcher 1; R2 – Researcher 2; R3 – Researcher 3; R4 – Researcher 4) were  
45  
46 recorded, where participants were asked to share their perceptions of what they had  
47  
48 learned and any subsequent impact on their mentoring experiences, confidence or sense  
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50 of preparedness to engage in mentoring conversations that were more non-hierarchic,  
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52 co-contributive and mutually beneficial. Mentoring conversations were intentionally not  
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54 observed as we were interested in the participants’ perceptions of preparedness and  
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56 confidence.  
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3 Following the conclusion of school visits, participants were invited to a final  
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5 online reflective session and completed an online open-ended questionnaire asking  
6  
7 about their key learnings and reflections from their professional learning experience  
8  
9 (Supplementary questionnaire). Questionnaires were coded as M for mentor response or  
10  
11 ECT for early career teacher response in conjunction with the questionnaire number.  
12  
13 For example, ECT7 would indicate an ECT response and Questionnaire 7.  
14  
15

16  
17 While we undertook some simple descriptive statistical analysis (percentages  
18  
19 and counts) of Likert questionnaire responses (Questions 1–6, 8, 10), our analysis was  
20  
21 primarily thematic. We thematically analysed (Braun *et al.*, 2019) professional learning  
22  
23 activity responses (n = 53), field notes (n = 4) and online post-questionnaire responses  
24  
25 (n = 16) using inductive coding and theme development to make meaning of  
26  
27 participants' responses (see Figure 2). Analysis commenced with first-round iterative  
28  
29 coding of data samples from each data set by a member of the research team. Following  
30  
31 this, two members of the team collaboratively discussed the coding of each data set, and  
32  
33 where different interpretations arose, researchers negotiated towards a consensus (Braun  
34  
35 *et al.*, 2019). The second round of coding involved revisiting all data sets and samples  
36  
37 with revised codes. Next, two members of the research team collaboratively generated a  
38  
39 combined coding frame across all three data sources and applied this across data sets in  
40  
41 a third round of coding. Themes were then collaboratively generated that captured “the  
42  
43 essence and spread of meaning” (Braun *et al.*, 2019, p. 845) across data sets.  
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49 **INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE**

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51 *Figure 2.* Data analysis process.  
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56 These themes are now presented and discussed in the following section.  
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## Findings

In this study, mentors and ECTs reported a sense of growing awareness about themselves and their ways of thinking that impacted how they thought about their own work within the mentoring process and their understanding of their mentoring relationships. Further, they perceived of possibilities for greater shared exploration of practice and inquiry.

### *Self-discovery and intellectual virtues*

From the perspective of a number of these participants, awareness and understanding of intellectual virtues shifted how they thought about their own personal contributions to their mentoring conversations. An opportunity to think about their own engagement of the virtues provoked a more intentional consideration of what they personally bring to mentoring by way of dispositions and what they could further develop to optimise their mentoring experiences.

On one hand, ECTs and mentors better understood their strengths and limitations, as suggested by one of the mentors in the questionnaire who commented, “an audit of the IVs [intellectual virtues] has helped the ECT and myself discover the virtues that need developing” (M3). One ECT further stated in the questionnaire, “it provided a chance to acknowledge my own strengths and weaknesses and building on these to be confident and learn. A good challenge!” (ECT5). On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the participants began to acknowledge the impact of these personal strengths and limitations. For example, one ECT posted on the activity Padlet in Workshop 1 that they were “holding back – I do not feel courageous enough to really contribute much and tend to let my mentor do the talking”. This prompted this ECT to think about how they might set a goal to speak up and share their ideas in mentoring conversations.

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3 For other participants, dispositions that had previously been perceived as  
4  
5 problematic were reframed as strengths. To illustrate, one ECT stated they felt that they  
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7 had been given permission through their learning to ask questions and that it was “OK  
8  
9 to be curious” and want to go more deeply into what their mentor might be suggesting  
10  
11 to them (Workshop 2 Padlet). As another ECT posted (Workshop 1), it was important to  
12  
13 “be courageous and question the mentor’s ideas”. When connecting with them on a  
14  
15 school visit, they went on to say that they had previously felt that by asking questions,  
16  
17 they may be perceived as either challenging the mentor’s ideas or potentially being less  
18  
19 effective as a teacher.  
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24 Specifically, several ECTs identified intellectual open-mindedness as a virtue  
25  
26 that was challenging for them, limiting their willingness to take on new ideas. In one of  
27  
28 the professional learning activities (Workshop 2), one of the ECTs posted that one of  
29  
30 the areas they felt they needed to work on was “having an open mind to hearing some  
31  
32 options” or, as another put it, “alternative methods”. Some mentors also felt a sense of  
33  
34 empowerment when redefining what they saw initially as being their limitations. For  
35  
36 one mentor, the opportunity to think about personal mentoring strengths through the  
37  
38 lens of intellectual virtues provided greater confidence: “I have actually been avoiding  
39  
40 meeting [ECT] as I knew I did not have all the answers and that scared me – who wants  
41  
42 to be found out like that?” (School Visit).  
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### 47 ***Reframing mentoring relationships and intellectual virtues***

48  
49 All questionnaire participants reported a shift in their understanding of the dynamics of  
50  
51 a mentoring relationship, with 80% indicating a moderate or considerable change  
52  
53 (Question 6). Open-ended responses (Question 7) indicated that in some cases, both  
54  
55 ECTs and mentors appeared quite surprised at the idea of mentoring as a bi-directional,  
56  
57 mutually beneficial relationship. To illustrate, ECT7 reported in the questionnaire that,  
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3 I never knew mentoring was a two-way street. I thought as a new teacher,  
4 you go to the mentor for help, you ask all the questions, and they answer  
5 them all. Who knew they might not have the answers? Or that I should be  
6 thinking of stuff myself too.  
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12 This shift was echoed following Workshop 2 when another ECT posted, “While there  
13 may be differences in level of experience/practical knowledge, there can still be  
14 information shared and growth occurring from both sides”, indicating recognition of the  
15 need for intellectual autonomy, courage and open-mindedness. Two of the researchers  
16 (R1 and R4) reported within their field notes that some ECTs felt that a focus on  
17 intellectual virtues gave them greater confidence as valuable colleagues when working  
18 with the mentor, assured that they were “not wasting the mentor’s time” (R1). Several  
19 ECTs had assumed that they had “nothing really to offer” (Workshop 2) but were  
20 spurred on by intellectual virtues encouraging intellectual courage and autonomy.  
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33 In some cases, the mentors also found they shifted in their understanding of their  
34 role and, by default, the nature of the mentoring dynamic. To illustrate, one mentor  
35 stated, “My biggest shift in understanding was around the intellectual virtues and the  
36 benefits in using those in mentoring sessions but also the importance of it being a  
37 conversation that I, as a mentor, can grow and learn from too.”  
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44 While several mentors personally advocated for mentoring as a partnership, a  
45 number of these same mentors indicated that intellectual virtues offered a practical  
46 approach and metalanguage to make that happen: “This has clarified my understanding  
47 of the mentoring relationship and the benefits and challenges which are part of this. It  
48 has also given me a wider vocabulary to strengthen and deepen discussions with my  
49 mentoring partner” (Questionnaire, Question 7, M4).  
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3 As one mentor posted (Workshop 2), “the dialogue around intellectual virtues are  
4  
5 new ways of framing conversations as constructive”. Similarly, another mentor  
6  
7 explained their thinking about the intellectual virtues in the following Padlet post:  
8  
9 “Context and being present and connected starts with engaging intentionally with the  
10  
11 intellectual virtues – a narrative of mutual growth, and trust.” Further posts (Workshop  
12  
13 2) demonstrated a clear shift among both mentors and ECTs. For the following mentor,  
14  
15 the preference for a relationship underpinned by reciprocity of benefit was clear,  
16  
17 whereby they argued that it is about “equal input for equal benefit – it’s not just all  
18  
19 about what the ECT asks or what the mentor knows”, recognising that intellectual  
20  
21 humility and open-mindedness are essential to such co-contributory conversations.  
22  
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26 Some ECTs drew on the understanding of intellectual autonomy and courage to  
27  
28 reframe their role in the mentoring conversation. For example, the following ECT  
29  
30 explained in Workshop 2 that “waiting for the mentor to do all the thinking and talking  
31  
32 is not contributing. The ECT needs to be courageous and contribute”. In this instance,  
33  
34 the ECT had begun to consider how to develop a stronger partnership in learning. In the  
35  
36 following instance (Workshop 2), the mentor was able to identify how their limited  
37  
38 enactment of curiosity was negatively impacting their partner’s mentoring experience:  
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42 I am conscious of the impact that time can have on my curiosity and  
43  
44 attentiveness when communicating with others. I need to be more mindful  
45  
46 of ensuring there is capacity to engage effectively in these conversations to  
47  
48 facilitate the open-mindedness that allows an ECT to have the intellectual  
49  
50 courage to try new things.  
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54 Similarly, another mentor shared via one of their posts that they needed to take “a  
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56 genuinely open-minded approach to the partnership” as without doing so, the ECT was  
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58 unable to exert their own intellectual autonomy.  
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3 In a paired activity in Workshop 2, the benefits of mentors being “upfront about  
4 what they know and don’t know” (Post) further pointed to how participants saw the  
5 enactment (and non-enactment) of intellectual virtues (in this instance, intellectual  
6 humility) influencing the kinds of mentoring partnerships that could develop. In another  
7 activity post (Workshop 2), a participant shared how they “discussed how it was  
8 important for the mentee and especially the mentor to show intellectual humility when  
9 discussing things. Being honest and working on things together”. This shift in  
10 understanding had an emerging impact on mentoring practice, with 93% of participants  
11 in the post-questionnaire reporting some change to their participation in mentoring  
12 conversations they practise post-professional learning (Question 8), and of these, 46%  
13 reported this change to be “considerable”.

### ***Practice as exploration and intellectual virtues***

31 In some cases, participants began to shift further to recognise how mentoring  
32 conversations guided by intellectual virtues could better contribute to their exploration  
33 of practice. In the field notes from one school visit (R1), a mentor and ECT shared how  
34 they were focusing on specific intellectual virtues as a means of exploring practice more  
35 deeply, noting their focus on intellectual thoroughness had increased the extent to which  
36 they challenged the assumed effectiveness of some of their “go-to practices”. One  
37 mentor explained that they had started “embracing the struggle around developing new  
38 practice”, thus indicating how intellectual tenacity was facilitating extended exploration  
39 of ideas and issues. As another participant in the final workshop put it, intellectual  
40 virtues like humility and thoroughness led them to greater levels of “wondering about  
41 how else things can or could or have been done”.

56 In sum, participants perceived personal, relational and learning benefits to using  
57 the mutual deployment of intellectual virtues as a way of thinking about and  
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3 approaching mentoring conversations. In so doing, they reported an enhanced sense of  
4  
5 personal value and confidence as a participant in these conversations. Further, they  
6  
7 perceived that intellectual virtues opened safe and respectful channels for partnered  
8  
9 professional learning, whereby both mentors and ECTs were expected to reciprocate as  
10  
11 mutually invested learners. Finally, the use of intellectual virtues could facilitate a rich  
12  
13 exploration of practice that values new ideas and deep inquiry. These key ideas are now  
14  
15 discussed.  
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## 20 **Discussion and implications**

21  
22 Contemporary mentoring underpinned by a non-hierarchic, co-contributory and  
23  
24 mutually beneficial approach requires a substantial paradigm shift (Goerisch *et al.*,  
25  
26 2019; Pennanen *et al.*, 2020) from both ECTs and mentors (Curtis *et al.*, 2024; Larsen,  
27  
28 Nguyen *et al.*, 2023) as they rethink their roles and responsibilities (Pennanen *et al.*,  
29  
30 2020) and ways of working with one another. Findings from this study provide insight  
31  
32 into how teachers may be supported to make this shift through an awareness of  
33  
34 intellectual virtues to guide how they think and interact with one another for personal  
35  
36 (increased confidence and sense of value), relational (equitable partnerships based on  
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38 mutual valuing and contribution) and learning benefit (exploration of practice) (see  
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40 Figure 3).  
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45 **INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE**

46  
47 *Figure 3. Intellectual virtues and mentoring.*  
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52 The findings from this study suggest that most participants were likely to  
53  
54 perceive shifts in their own beliefs and understandings about their own role and  
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56 opportunities within the mentoring conversation. For example, intellectual curiosity  
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58 shifted from a disposition associated with vulnerability to one that was celebrated.  
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3 Previous studies have noted that ECTs are cautionary about engaging fully in  
4 professional learning opportunities, with increased cultures of teacher performativity  
5 and accountability posited as counterproductive to professional learning (Mockler,  
6 2022). According to Larsen and Allen (2023) and Hobson and Malderez (2013), ECTs  
7 may avoid full engagement in mentoring, fearing judgement and a loss of acceptance  
8 among their peers (Atkinson, 2012), stating ECTs “are likely to avoid revealing their  
9 perceived inadequacies, may limit their participation, or filter the extent to which they  
10 engage in open and honest dialogue about their professional learning needs” (Larsen  
11 and Allen, 2023, p. 88). Keltchermans (2019) argues the importance of valuing,  
12 acknowledging and leveraging the substantial innovative perspectives and capacities  
13 that ECTs bring to the school context. Mentoring underpinned by intellectual virtues  
14 was viewed by these ECTs and mentors as going some way to addressing these fears  
15 and instead celebrating dispositions of intellectual curiosity and courage and  
16 emphasising the importance of humanistic aspects of mentoring.  
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35 Some mentors also felt a sense of empowerment when redefining what they saw  
36 initially as being their limitations. A prevailing traditional view of mentoring, whereby  
37 the mentor serves as the expert and fount of all knowledge (Aspfors and Fransson,  
38 2015), has in some contexts created pressure for those mentors that do not hold to, or  
39 feel unable to fulfil, the role of an expert (Curtis *et al.*, 2024; Pennanen *et al.*, 2020).  
40 While the literature speaks about the potential stress of mentoring for the ECT (Lambert  
41 and Gray, 2020), this study highlights the pressures on mentors where they perceive  
42 their role as one requiring extensive expertise that they may not feel they necessarily  
43 possess, inhibiting their approach and involvement as a mentor. This would indicate that  
44 teachers are aware that mentoring occurs in a social and political space (Mockler, 2022),  
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3 and therefore, any interaction has an inherent vulnerability. By redefining intellectual  
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5 humility as a strength, mentors may feel greater confidence in their role.  
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8 The study identified that mentors and ECTs recognise how particular  
9  
10 relationships may constrain or enable opportunities for mentoring to facilitate the  
11  
12 professional learning of both parties. Relationships underscored by co-contribution of  
13  
14 effort and ideas help to reduce the burden of assumed expertise carried by the mentor  
15  
16 and thus establish a non-hierarchical mentoring relationship conducive to the  
17  
18 professional growth of both parties (Goerisch *et al.*, 2019; Stanulis *et al.*, 2019).  
19  
20 However, as Stanulis *et al.* (2019) and others (Beutel *et al.*, 2017; Robson and Mtika,  
21  
22 2017) report, this shift in relational expectations is challenging and largely without  
23  
24 practical guidance (Bullough, 2012; Taylor and Black, 2018).  
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29 In this study, we found that when mentors approached listening with a genuine  
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31 belief that others' ideas are worth hearing, or with an open-minded disposition and  
32  
33 authentic curiosity about the ideas being shared, the ECT was more likely to be active  
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35 as a co-thinker and peer learner (Vaitzman Ben-David and Berkovich, 2022).  
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37 Furthermore, ECTs connected their own intellectual autonomy and concurrent courage  
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39 to share their thinking with this same commitment to co-inquiry (Fonseca-Chacana,  
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41 2019). Under these circumstances, both individuals and the partnership benefit, an  
42  
43 affordance of mentoring highlighted in recent research (Vaitzman Ben-David and  
44  
45 Berkovich, 2022), particularly in relation to reciprocal mentoring (see, for example,  
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47 Baker and Bitto, 2021).  
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51 This study therefore underscores the importance of intentionally developing the  
52  
53 relational capabilities of both mentor and ECT (Curtis *et al.*, 2024; Larsen, Nguyen *et*  
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55 *al.*, 2023; Vostal *et al.*, 2021) as a precursor to effectively opening opportunities for the  
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57 robust exploration of practice. Goodwin (2021) describes this as the humanity that is  
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3 inherent to mentoring, with previous research arguing rich exploration of practice is  
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5 predicated on the 'relationship imperative' (Larsen, Curtis *et al.*, 2023). This study,  
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7 therefore, suggests that professional learning, or training for mentoring, not only is  
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9 critical but must shift from a traditional focus on training the mentor to training that  
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11 includes both mentors and mentees as participants equally responsible for the success  
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13 and rigour of the mentoring process. This study goes further to suggest intellectual  
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15 virtues may support this relational imperative, as well as offer further guidance for the  
16  
17 deep exploration of co-constructed knowledge (Langdon and Ward, 2015) and practice  
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19 through the mutual deployment of intellectual tenacity and thoroughness (Smith, 2023).  
20  
21 In short, dispositional training for mentors and ECTs stands to ready them for both the  
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23 personal and relational demands and opportunities of mentoring partnerships.  
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### 29 **Limitations and further research**

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31 The authors acknowledge some limitations to the study that should be considered in the  
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33 reading of the findings. First, the study is context-specific, involving a small number of  
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35 Australian independent schools; thus, the generalisability of findings to other Australian  
36  
37 contexts or schools and school sectors and international contexts may be limited.  
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39  
40 Second, this study was conducted in 2022 as schools in Queensland and New South  
41  
42 Wales were emerging from two years of ongoing shutdowns due to the COVID-19  
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44 pandemic. Schools were faced with considerable staff shortages, and this research was  
45  
46 therefore designed to limit impost on both schools and teachers. Further research with  
47  
48 opportunities to collect more time-intensive data at the school site, including  
49  
50 conversational transcripts, would further contribute to these initial findings. We  
51  
52 encourage further research that involves alternative local, national and international  
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54 contexts and longitudinal approaches that can build upon these findings.  
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## Conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to understand how professional learning about intellectual virtues can support teachers' preparedness for non-hierarchic and collaborative mentoring conversations. This study responds to shifting expectations for mentoring to embrace a more non-hierarchic and collaborative stance and, problematically, the lack of guidance teachers have available to them as to how to achieve this more egalitarian stance. This study involved 31 teachers (ECTs and teacher mentors) and five independent schools from across two states in Australia. Teachers engaged in three short professional learning sessions about intellectual virtues, and data collected via professional learning activities, school visit field notes and a post-professional learning questionnaire were analysed thematically to gather perceptions in response to the aim of the study.

Findings demonstrated that teachers in this study perceived that intellectual virtues, mutually deployed by ECTs and mentors in mentoring conversations, offered a way forward towards enhancing personal confidence and feelings of value as a participant in the mentoring partnership, facilitating the development of mutually respectful relationships and co-contributory participation and opening opportunities for a deeper exploration of practice and knowledge.

Intellectual virtues as a suite of cognitive dispositions offer an alternative and/or additional lens to the development of mutually beneficial and non-hierarchic mentoring partnerships. Findings from this study point to the value of including the study of intellectual virtues as a part of mentoring professional learning with ECTs and teacher mentors at the school or sector/system level and the deployment of these virtues within contemporary mentoring approaches that demand of teachers a greater embrace of partnered learning and democratic practices. While this study is located in the

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2  
3 Australian context, these findings have global resonance as countries across the world  
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5 experience a shift in mentoring culture to the primordial “we” and seek ways to meet  
6  
7 this challenge.  
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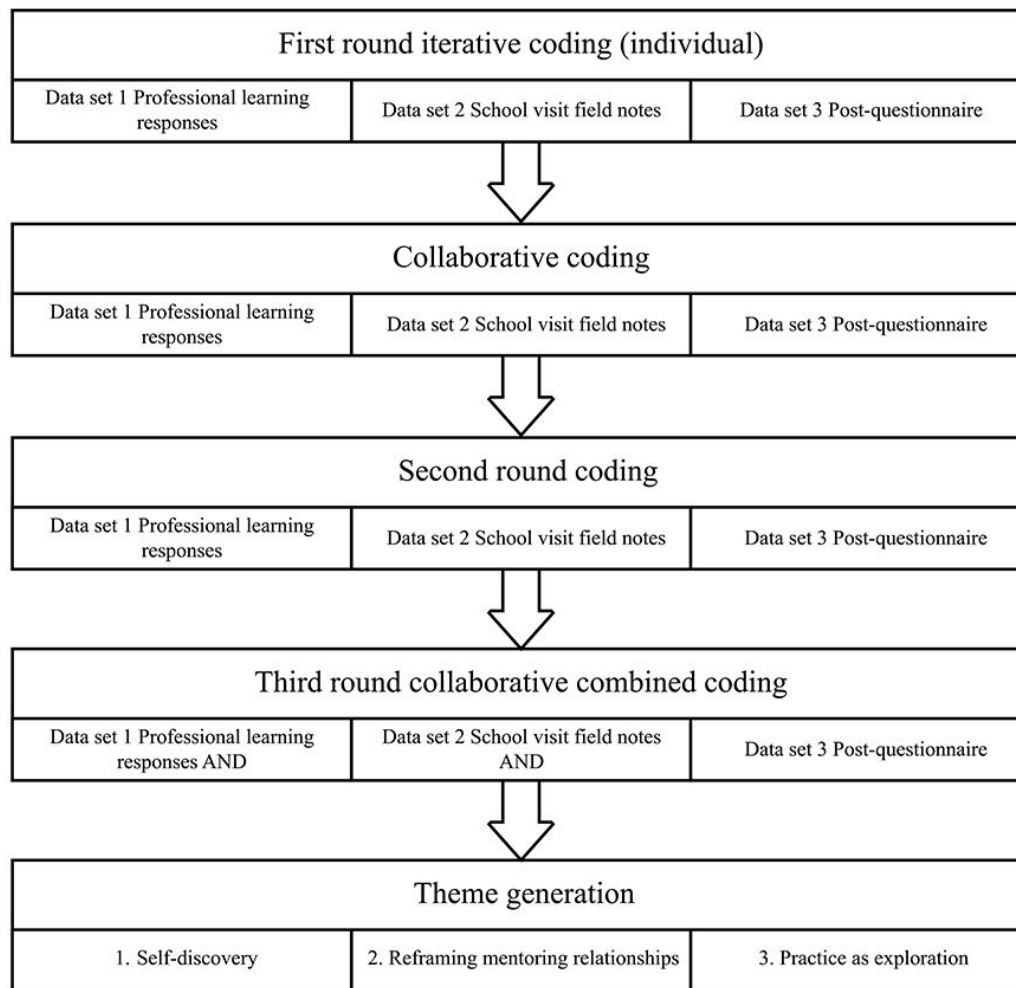


Figure 2. Data analysis process.

(Figure is property of authors)