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An examination of the interaction between discourses in a post-lesson mentoring conversation on professional experience

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ABSTRACT

Post-lesson mentoring conversations on professional experience are an important aspect of embodied learning for pre-service teachers. Recent research has identified the five most common types of discursive interactions in post-lesson conversations. This study built on the recent research to examine discursive interactions in one post-lesson mentoring conversation between a pre-service teacher and a mentor in Australia. The analysis found that evaluative discourse dominated the mentoring conversation, and more directive suggestions were evident towards the end of the mentoring conversations. We attributed such patterns in conversations to the role of the supervisor as the chief assessor. The context-sensitive nature of post-lesson conversations encourages future researchers to explore discourses embedded in mentor-mentee conversations in various contexts.

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Preservice teachers' participation in professional experience has been demonstrated to be a critical component of their preparation for the profession. While identified using other terms such as practicum and student teaching (Nielsen et al., 2022) and more recently as practical experience (Australian Government, 2023), this school-based preparation refers to the period that a preservice teacher spends in situated learning in a classroom with a qualified teacher (Nielsen et al., 2022). Despite differences between the durations of professional experience that a preservice teacher may undertake and the specifics of context and practical requirements (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020), research has clearly demonstrated that the opportunity to engage in the real world of teaching during teacher preparation "can harness the richness of authentic contextual workplace influences" (Patton, 2023, p. 49) and provide the kind of embodied experience of the inherent challenges, constraints and complexities of teaching (Chaaban & Nguyen, 2025; Patton & Higgs, 2018) in ways that academic learning environments, such as the university, cannot accomplish.

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The quality of the professional experience, however, has come under intense scrutiny in Australia, for example, as illustrated by its centrality to contemporary reviews of teacher education programmes (Nielsen et al., 2022). The latest review, The Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) Report (Australian Government, 2023), argues the critical role that practical experience placements play in providing preservice teachers with "the opportunity to apply their learning and practise their skills in classroom settings" (p. 4) with the recommendation made that national guidelines be developed to ensure consistent high-quality experiences are available to all preservice teachers. Understanding the complexities of professional experience is therefore paramount.

Much research has identified the role of the supervising teacher (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Clarke et al., 2014; Ellis et al., 2020; Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020), as a critical factor in influencing the quality of experience the preservice teacher has during their practical placement (Naidoo & Wagner, 2020, Nielsen et al., 2022). According to Nielsen et al. (2022), p. 47), these teachers are likely to assume the role of "providers of feedback, "supporters of reflection" and "modellers of practice" for preservice teachers. However, the role of the supervising teacher is uniquely challenging because of the expectations that they will, in some contexts such as in Australia, simultaneously support and assess the preservice teacher (Sheridan & Tindall-Ford, 2018; Tillema et al., 2011). The enactment of these seemingly opposed responsibilities has the potential to create tension as preservice and supervising teachers engage in discursive interactions through, for example, often used post-lesson observation mentoring conversations (Vanassche, 2023), post-observation feedback (Donaghue, 2020), feedback conferences (Copland & Donaghue, 2019) and dialogues (Hennissen et al., 2008) or mentoring conversations (Nielsen et al., 2022) designed as an opportunity for preservice teachers to critically reflect on their practice (Loughland et al., 2021).

Given the diversity in defining this type of mentor–mentee interactions, in this study, we examined the mentoring conversation between a mentor and a senior undergraduate student to explore the type of discursive interactions embedded in the conversation. We have used the term "mentoring conversation" to refer to the post-lesson mentoring conversations between the supervising teacher and the preservice teacher during their professional experience, and the discursive interactions between mentors and mentees are understood as "discourses," referring to the language embedded in social interactions that requires the use of linguistic, non-linguistic, and contextual knowledge (Ehrlich & Romaniuk, 2014). Drawing on Vanassche's (2023) five patterns of discursive interaction including directive discourse, normalising discourse, analytic discourse, justificatory discourse, and evaluative discourse as the analytical tool for this study, we examine in detail the transcript of one Australian supervising teacher-preservice teacher post-lesson mentoring conversation. In doing so, we contribute a clearer understanding of how supervising teachers enact these discursive moves during post-lesson mentoring conversations and the influence of these on the relational and learning experiences of the preservice teacher.

Mentoring conversations

To improve the quality of mentoring, researchers have begun to explore the role of mentoring conversations as central to the professional interchange between a more

experienced teacher with a less experienced teacher in socially embedded discourse in which both the mentors and the mentee are situated and regulated. As a result, there have been an increasing number of studies which have looked at the role of mentoring conversations (Larsen et al., 2023), types of interactions, particularly the conversations during feedback sessions between pre-service teachers, university supervisors or cooperating teachers (Mena et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2022; Sheridan & Young, 2017). Much evidence shows that quality mentoring conversations, are critically important to the preservice teachers' learning during the practical experience. Research suggests the key aspects of the conversations which are highly valued include non-hierarchical, collaborative, reflective, and foster the preservice teachers' critical inquiries of their practice (Donaghue, 2020; Helgevold et al., 2015; Kim & Silver, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2022). Mentoring conversations contribute to provide the preservice teachers with opportunities to negotiate their identity (Donaghue, 2020; Izadinia, 2015) and to develop their teaching practice (Nielsen et al., 2022; Sheridan & Young, 2017; Tillema & Orland-Barak, 2006). However, research has shown that the post-lesson mentoring conversations are not always fruitful and sometimes fail to facilitate preservice teachers' learning during the professional experience (e.g., Bjørndal et al., 2024; Hudson & Hudson, 2018). How mentoring dialogues happen is a question that has been studied from various perspectives and in differing contexts.

Most studies looking at mentoring conversations highlight several issues. First, the contents of the mentoring conversations do not move beyond the feedback on some pedagogical issues such as classroom management, student behaviour and teaching methods (Helgevold et al., 2015; Land, 2018). It is understandable that these are the prominent challenges facing preservice teachers. However, the overfocus on the teaching performance in the mentoring conversation rather than the enquiries into their teaching practice fails to develop dialogic pedagogy (Myhill et al., 2006) which is embedded in authentic inquiries-based dialogue between the mentors and the mentees. Second, a lack of resources including the mentor preparation for clear expectations and responsibilities, mentor skill training, time pressure (Copland & Donaghue, 2019; Hall, 2017), heavy workload (Donaghue, 2020); and school support make this conversation less developmental for the mentees' learning. In her qualitative meta-synthesis, Hart (2020) argued that the lack of clarity in defining the roles and expectations of mentors has led to frustration, conflicts, and tension. In another study on feedback conferences, Hall (2017) reported that time pressure shifts away the reflective aspects of the feedback conference as most of the time was reported to devote for other matters such as class preparation rather than a deep discussion/reflection on the class observation. These constraints limit the preservice teachers' capacity for developing their teaching practice through self- reflection and collective reflection with a more experienced teacher. Third, much evidence (Donaghue, 2020; Louw et al., 2016) shows that in most cases the mentors always control the floor by overwhelming the preservice teachers with judgement and advice. Mentoring conversations were evidenced as asymmetrical, where the teacher mentors are often positioned themselves as ones who are dominant and most powerful (Copland & Donaghue, 2019). The post-lesson mentoring conversation tends to be an "evaluative event" (Donaghue, 2020, p. 401). It can lead to anxiety and stress experienced by the preservice teachers during their professional experience (Li et al., 2023).

Discourses in mentoring conversations

In response to these issues, there have been several studies that have sought to advocate for a particular kind of discourse that "should be" enacted between the supervising teacher and preservice teacher during post-lesson mentoring conversations. For example, studies have created conversational procedures or models for supervising teachers and preservice teachers to follow, such as the GROW model by Loughland et al. (2021) and the Professional Conversations Model (Leonard, 2012). Jyrhama (2001) in her study with PSTs in Finland, found that "why" questions asked by the university supervisors helped PSTs think about the components of effective teaching and critically discuss their own teaching practices. Wetzel et al. (2017) examined the use of a reflective and problem -posing model entitled "Coaching with CARE" in mentoring conversation to develop mentees' reflection and position mentoring as collaborative learning between the mentors and preservice teachers rather the transmission model of learning. Most models have largely privileged through different discursive moves within supervising and preservice teacher interactions in post-lesson mentoring conversations. These studies offer an insight on strategies or tools the mentor teachers can use to mediate the mentoring conversations.

There is limited research; however, that investigates the kinds of discourses that are used, authentically and without intervention, and the ways in which these discursive moves may or may not work together (Vanassche, 2023). This echoes the need for close examination of mentor-mentee conversations as naturally occurring situations that highlight the discursive tools/strategies that can inhibit and/or facilitate preservice teacher learning (e.g., Mosley et al., 2023; Wetzel et al., 2017). Furthermore, mentoring conversations are a socially mediated practice which varies in different socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts. This paper is conducted in response to the call for more empirical accounts of mentoring conversations (Carmi & Tamir, 2023), addressing the concern of insufficient evidence of how mentoring conversation happens despite the consensus in the literature on the significance of quality mentoring conversations for preservice teachers during their professional experience.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study was one established on discursive interactions in post-lesson mentoring conversations or mentoring conversations as the term used in this study (Vanassche, 2023). It was chosen for this study for its empirical rigour, the positioning of mentoring conversations as a social practice and its refreshing absence of instrumentalism.

The theoretical framework for this study has empirical and theoretical rigour. The empirical rigour is founded in the large dataset of lesson mentoring conversations that were analysed to establish five patterns of discursive interaction: "directive discourse; normalizing discourse; analytic discourse; justificatory discourse; and evaluative discourse" (Vanassche, 2023, p. 4). According to Vanassche (2023), discourses are directive when mentors offer suggestions, which usually occur together with evaluative discourses on mentees' actions, and mentors might initiate normalising discourses while comforting mentees that problems are typical and normal. Mentors and mentees may also produce analytical discourses on a lesson by generating a "systematic

interpretation of that practice" (Vanassche, 2023, p. 6), and discourses become justificatory when the focus of mentoring conversations is mentees' meaning-making of their teaching practices. These discursive patterns were credible to our research team who are well-grounded in the practice and analysis of mentoring conversations in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. We were also keen to investigate Vanassche's call for future research that "might examine more closely the interaction and conflicts between the rules and imperatives of different discourses" (Vanassche, 2023, p. 9).

The positioning of post-lesson mentoring conversations as discourses of social practice by Vanassche (2023) makes their framework relevant to this study. We agree with Vanassche (2023) that the post-lesson conversation is a discursive social practice that serves an important social function in professional experience whilst also being a practice focused on action. This orientation is depicted by Vanassche as, "an analysis of what people *do* through discourse" (Vanassche, 2023, p. 2)

The theoretical framework for this study is not instrumentalist in its intent. Mentoring studies, including analysis of lesson mentoring conversations, are sometimes guided by theoretical presuppositions that pre-determine the purpose and structure of the conversational endeavour (Carmi & Tamir, 2023). In other words, the framework of discursive actions (Vanassche, 2023) framing this study has not been used to guide the post-teaching conversation, but rather to understand it. Unlike mentoring studies that may seek to understand the conversations between mentor and mentee guided by a pre-determined conversational instrument or script. This study sought to engage with the authentic discursive reality of a post-lesson mentoring conversation during professional experience.

Methods

This section of the paper explicates the origin of the data used in this study. It also explains the measures taken to conduct ethical research as well as the six steps of data analyses employed.

Research context

This study was conducted in a public primary school in New South Wales, Australia. Pre-service teachers enrolled in Bachelor of Education programmes in a university in New South Wales are required to complete their professional experience in placement schools. These pre-service teachers are mentored by experienced schoolteachers (referred to as supervising teachers) in placement schools with the university representative only playing a liaison role. Supervising teachers, therefore, are responsible for both the mentoring and the final assessment of preservice teachers on their placement. This primary school has a long-standing partnership with the university. Every year, they accept a high number of preservice teachers doing professional experience in their school. Most of the supervising teachers have participated in the mentoring training and professional development activities organised by the university.

Data source

The lesson transcript analysed in this study was chosen from a larger dataset that included 54 recordings and transcripts of post-lesson mentoring conversations. The lesson mentoring conversations were from 29 schools in NSW (Australia), capturing a wide range of primary and secondary schools across the state. In addition, the participating teacher education students were from multiple universities in NSW, thereby capturing a range of different teacher education programmes. We report the analytical result of one post-lesson conversation between a mentor (supervising teacher) and a senior undergraduate student (the preservice teacher) following the preservice teacher's implementation of a Mathematics and Graphs lesson (compass points and direction) because the length of transcripts ensured sufficient data for analysis. This mentoring conversation was selected as the preservice teacher and mentor had been working with each other for a certain period time to ensure the authenticity of the conversation. Although this school mentor has teaching experience, she has not attended any mentoring training so far.

Ethics

The study was granted ethics approval (HC17581) by the lead author's Human Research Advisory Panel. All participants participated voluntarily, and written consent was obtained by sending consent forms and an information sheet about the study to supervising teachers who responded in the affirmative to an emailed invitation. The supervising teachers and their teacher education students were given the opportunity to read 'the letter of invitation' and 'the participant information statement' and sign the consent forms to acknowledge their willingness to participate.

Data analysis

Drawing on Vanassche's (2023) analytical methods, the first author conducted the deductive analysis of the chosen transcript in six steps (see Figure 1).

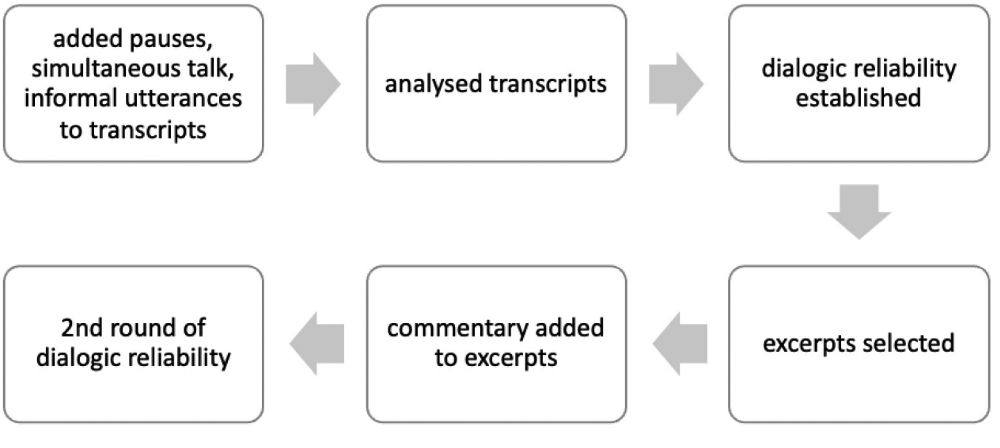

Figure 1. Data analysis process.

First, they listened to the audio recording to check if the original transcript was accurate as well as adding pauses, simultaneous talk, and non-formal utterances such as "mhrm." Second, they analysed the transcript using the discursive framework of Vanassche (2023). Third, they met with the three co-authors to establish dialogic reliability (Åkerlind, 2005) for this first phase of analysis. Fourth, they chose excerpts from the transcript that demonstrated evidence of interaction of two or more of the discourses defined by Vanassche (2023). Fifth, commentary was added to these excerpts to describe the nature of these interactions. Sixth, another round of dialogic reliability was conducted with the three authors to probe the first author's reasoning for each analytic commentary.

The findings are reported in the following section. In the reporting, the abbreviation ST is used to signify the Supervising Teacher and PST is used to signify the preservice teacher in the conversation.

Results

The study found evidence of three of Vanassche's (2023) discourses in the in-depth analysis of the transcript of one post-lesson mentoring conversation. These were evaluative, normalising, and directive discourse. The interaction of these discourses is reported here.

> **ST:** Okay [name] so you've just finished (.) your lesson (.) on um position (2) um using coordinates to move from different spaces on a map (.) how do you feel that the (.) lesson went? (lines 1–3)

The question posed here by the ST is a very mild form of evaluative discourse. It is an open-ended invitation for the PST to conduct their own self-evaluation on topics of their choice.

> **PST:** Um I think it went quite well in terms of the students' behaviour and how they responded um to the activities (.) um so we started off (.) first with a (.) movement activity (.) so the room was labelled with north south east and west (1) um after telling which direction the students are to be moving, they all moved um at the same time and move to the (.) um respective position. (lines 3–8)

The response from the PST is more descriptive than evaluative in that they focus more on what the students did and not how well they did it. This prompts the ST to sharpen the focus of their evaluative question:

> **ST:** Fantastic (.) and (.) do you have any evidence for the students and their learning from the lesson and how well they took on the concepts you were trying to communicate? (lines 9–10)

This evaluative question seems to mimic the language of the graduate teacher standards with its reference to "evidence for the students and their learning" and "concepts you were trying to communicate?." This is a higher level of self-evaluation required on the part of the PST than what was expected in the first evaluative question posed by the ST. This was the PST's response:

> **PST:** Yeah um so basically after doing our activity in which during the activity they did um correctly all move to the um correct direction (1) so we had three worksheets to be completed um they were focused on the coordinates in maps (.) um so I'm still focusing on the north

south east west, but also incorporating the (.) um grids, so um for example A1 is where our treasure cave is//mhmm//and so on (lines 11–15).

The PST's response is similar to their first response in that they focus on what the students did and not how well they did it. The//mhmm//interjection may have indicated the ST's dissatisfaction with this response that then prompted yet another evaluative question:

ST: Okay can I just ask I think worksheets can sometimes be a good scaffold (.) can you perhaps think of other ways of getting students to demonstrate (.) their understanding during the lesson without using worksheets? (lines 16–18)

This question move is connected directly to the lesson activity and evokes a different response from the PST:

PST: I think maybe creating a game (.) in terms of showing what they understand and also reflecting back on their previous (1) on their prior knowledge so probably creating a game (2) where students in groups in threes or twos and probably creating games so that they kind of dictate where the class goes (.) and what they um are to be doing (lines 19–22)

ST: Yeah that sounds like a great hands-on activity that gets them moving and thinking about the concepts that you're trying to teach them (.) and get them communicating and using that language (.) that you're also trying (.) to get them to be reusing. Fantastic (.) (lines 22–25)

The evaluation discourse is now one of praise for the PST as they demonstrated their pedagogical knowledge has the potential to take their practice beyond the use of worksheets in future lessons. Interestingly, the ST returns to the evidence question in lines 50–51 but this time evidence is expressed as data:

ST: (.) So were you able to capture any data on how students were progressing through the lesson and achieving the outcomes that you set out in the beginning? (lines 50–51)

PST: Um (.) yes (.) so one of the expectations were them being able to list up the correct coordinates (.) in terms of that things generally have achieved um that outcome (1) some has probably misinterpreted the um task um but in general I think most of the students have gotten the (.) um gist of the lesson//mhrm mhrm mhrm//and I think with a variety of tasks kind of like um give a wider snapshot of their (.) their understanding (lines 52–56).

The six pauses from the PST in their response suggest they were a little unsure of what to say. The elongated//mhrm mhrm mhrm//interjection from the ST may indicate that they were not sure about the evaluative quality of the PST's response. This is confirmed in the following comments from the ST that move from asking evaluative questions of the PST to a directive discourse:

ST: Fantastic um and I guess for next time maybe just thinking about some other alternate ways of providing feedback to students on their learning (.) drawing them back to the

learning intention of the lesson (.) and just providing them with that um immediate feedback of how they're going, and at various different points of the lesson and especially during reflection times at the ends of lessons (.) having that opportunity to get students to reflect and provide that feedback is then also a great idea//yep//(lines 57–62)

The provision of direct advice to the PST appears to be the discursive move of last resort for this supervising teacher. Their preference seems to be to mitigate the evaluative tone through questioning or normalisation to assure the PST that their challenge is one that is in the normal range of teacher experience. The normalisation discourse was evident in lines 65–77 at the end of the lesson debrief:

ST: Fantastic, um do you have any questions about the lesson or (1) any other advice I can give you about position lessons into the future?

PST: um I think maybe I'm slightly guess running out of ideas in terms of the content (.) um partly because they are extension class um the challenge sometimes even myself I don't get all the content by myself, so at times I feel that the students are kind of ahead off me in a sense (.) so in that case (.) what can I . . .

ST: Yeah well I mean I feel exactly the same way I definitely empathize with that (.) um and also just remembering that we're here to facilitate students in their learning (.) we're not out the front directing students all the time in their learning, they're able to take that ownership over their learning, so maybe opening up some tasks and allowing a bit more of that student voice, so students get to investigate (.) maybe some multi-step tasks in groups related to the topic that you're covering in any chosen KLA//OK//but I'm always getting that student feedback (1) um for the topics and areas that interest them, that's always a great place to start. OK?

PST: OK (lines 69–77)

The ST commences the exchange with normalisation, "well I mean I feel exactly the same way I definitely empathize with that," but then switches to directive mode for the remainder of the exchange. This last comment from the ST has the appearance that they are trying to include as much advice as possible to the PST before the conversation closes. It is almost as if the ST has a list of feedback points that they need to complete; teaching as facilitation, student ownership of learning, open-ended multi-step tasks in groups, student voice and giving students some choice in content for the curriculum.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that interaction between the discourses used by Supervising Teachers in post-lesson mentoring conversations with PSTs does occur. The

interactions in this study occurred between the evaluative, normalising and directive discourses as identified by Vanassche (2023). The patterns of discursive interaction warrant discussion in and of themselves, but attention must also be given here to the social practices of professional experience in Australia that sustain these patterns.

Patterns of discursive interaction

Evaluative discourse was the most prominent discourse in the post-lesson mentoring conversation analysed for this study. It was mainly performed with the "pronounced care and mitigation talk" that expressed empathy and normalised pre-service teachers' experiences recognised by Vanassche (2023), p. 8) as well as through praise. The evaluative discourse was sometimes intermingled with the mitigation talk of normalising discourses and at other times it became directive discourse. This intermingling pattern offers many interesting insights into post-lesson mentoring conversations on professional experience that we argue in the following paragraphs.

The pronounced care was typified by the ST leading with evaluative questions that either gave the PST scope to self-evaluate or guided them in their responses. This care in the preservation of the working relationship between supervisor and pre-service teacher is understandable given that both parties need to work together for a block of time that can range from anywhere between four and nine weeks for PSTs' professional experience placements in NSW. Care may also be associated with the feedback techniques that supervisors use with their own (school) students. This feedback often involves teachers asking a leading question that assists the student to self-evaluate (Nguyen, 2022).

The mitigation talk of normalising discourse is another expression of the pronounced care that these supervising teachers imbued in their post-lesson mentoring conversation. The normalisation of teaching challenges is an expression of empathy by the ST. It is a gesture of solidarity that assures the preservice teacher that teaching challenges are both universal and perennial. This finding aligns with the idea posited in a recent Israeli study where "good" supervising teachers adjust the pre-service teacher's challenges related to concurrently teaching and managing the classroom (Carmi & Tamir, 2023). This gesture of solidarity and understanding resonates with the ideal of a "good" mentoring relationship between STs and PSTs that is based on empathy and acknowledgement that the ST understands the emotions being felt by the PST and supports them emotionally (Izadinia, 2015).

Finally, directive discourse was the last piece of the interactive pattern in the post-lesson mentoring conversation analysed in this study. It might be argued from our evidence that pronounced care is also evident in the positioning of the directive discourse towards the end of the mentoring conversation. The interactive pattern in the mentoring conversation flowed from being more evaluative interwoven with some reassuring normalisation before ending in more directive discourse. It seems that the ethic of care of the supervisor influences the interaction of the discourses as they try to leave the directive discourse or the telling part to the end. This pattern may also be influenced by the time available for the mentoring conversation that may be truncated by the myriad other duties of the supervising teacher. The truncation may force the telling into the final part of the conversation if the supervisor realises, they are running out of time to provide formative assessment to the pre-service teacher in their role as the chief assessor of the

professional experience. Since Vanassche (2023) points out that directive discourses imply the ideal position of mentors as the guide of mentees, we interpret the assessor role as one expression of the underlying structural causes that influence the interaction of discourses in the post-lesson mentoring conversations in Australia.

The possible structural causes of the discursive interaction patterns in Australia

The ST role in Australia has become associated with a powerful authorisation identity (Donaghue, 2020) that has emerged from the accountability and performance regimes imposed upon initial teacher education throughout this century. The label of supervising teacher, rather than mentor teacher, signals their role as the chief assessor. The university supervisor role has been relegated to that of liaison with an occasional role to play in the moderation of pre-service teacher assessment across schools. In practice, this means that the ST is relegated to the role of sole, or at least primary, assessor of the PSTs' performance while on professional experience placement.

It is not surprising to our research team that STs, in their role as assessor, may employ more evaluative and directive discourses in their conversations with PSTs as they need to focus on making judgements about the performance rather than the development of the preservice teacher (Copland & Donaghue, 2019; Louw et al., 2016). This means there is less opportunity for analytic discourse that prompts preservice teachers to think about the reasons behind their pedagogical choices within the lesson. This is concerning given that these post-lesson conversations are often referred to as mentoring or feedback conversations, which by its very definition is to identify "strengths and weaknesses of a lesson with a view to improving practice" (Copland & Donaghue, 2019, p. 403). As an assessor, as opposed to a mentor, the ST's position in the supervisory triad (ST, PST and University Supervisor) is therefore dependent on the role prescribed to the ST in the triad (Hart, 2020) which, currently in the Australian context, seems to be as a "go-between" for the PST and the University Supervisor (Hart, 2020), as well as assessor and mentor. Our analysis of this post-lesson conversation highlights this tension within the ST's role in the contemporary Australian context.

The predominance of evaluative and directive discourses in post-lesson mentoring conversations highlights the mismatch between mentoring research and the reality of mentoring practice (Carmi & Tamir, 2023). Research should focus on what does occur in post-lesson mentoring conversations rather than setting up a deterministic idealisation that is impossible to achieve under the kind of structural pressures like that in the Australian system. In our study, it was fascinating to witness the pronounced care taken by STs in their role as both future and current colleagues and gatekeepers to the profession for their PST. This care reflects the humanity of the post-lesson conversation that transcends the pedagogical goals of the researcher or the compliance requirements of the state.

Conclusion

The findings of this study serve as evidence that supervising teachers may feel positioned as assessors rather than mentors in the post-lesson mentoring

conversations in professional experience in Australia. The primary role of assessor means that the supervising teacher naturally engage in more evaluative and directive discourses rather than analytic discourses. However, the supervising teacher in this study combined the role of assessor with a pronounced care that was humanistic rather than instrumentalist in its orientation. That said, this study underscores the need for STs to understand both the discursive content and implications of their post-teaching conversations. Further, findings point to the criticality of professional learning for STs that extends beyond their role expectations as assessors of PSTs to ensure that they have the skills to engage in rich and varied discursive interactions that promote teacher growth.

There are two implications for further research in this area from these findings. First, we agree with Carmi and Tamir (2023) that research should focus on working from the evidence on what is happening rather than what they think should be happening. We recommend that researchers could further the exploration of the diversity in mentoring conversations, so initial teacher education is capable of satisfying mentees' need for differentiated mentor support (Mosley et al., 2023). Second, research needs to recognise that the post-lesson mentoring conversation as a social practice that is an artefact of the socio-political reality of the time. At present in Australia, that reality is one where the assessment controls for professional experience in initial teacher education are located within schools where time and resources are limited. Given this reality, STs do a remarkable job of humanising the assessment process for PSTs in Australia.

This paper is not without limitations with findings from one case reported. Therefore, the authors do not claim that the discursive patterns identified within this case are necessarily generalisable to the broader ST and PST population. The authors encourage further studies in this regard. Future researchers may also consider exploring the discourses co-constructed by mentors and mentees in different contexts. Nevertheless, we do not aim to evaluate the desirability or appropriateness of specific discursive moves in this paper; rather, through the rich description of these moves in practice, we believe that possibilities for discursive practice between supervising teachers and preservice teachers while on professional experience may become salient.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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