Research paper

It's a question of balance: Reconsidering learning partnerships through genuine teacher mentoring conversations

Ellen Larsen [a,*], Hoa T.M. Nguyen [b], Elizabeth Curtis [a], Tony Loughland [b]

[a] *University of Southern Queensland, Australia*
[b] *University of New South Wales, Australia*

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

In Australia, and internationally, mentoring is proffered as a powerful professional learning experience for both early career teachers (ECTs) and their mentors alike. However, authentically beneficial learning partnerships have proven challenging to achieve. This paper provides a theoretical and practical response to this issue, arguing the criticality of genuine conversations cultivated through balanced, non-hierarchical questioning to position ECTs and mentors as co-learners. Drawing on positioning theory in conjunction with the concept of genuine conversations, the contents of five recorded mentoring conversations involving Australian ECTs and mentors were analysed. These findings have important implications for mentoring practice across educational contexts.

1. Introduction

Teacher shortages, attrition, and teacher quality (Björk et al., 2019; Heffernan et al., 2022; Sandmeier et al., 2022) are occupying the education headlines around the world. Australia, as a case in point, is currently experiencing an unprecedented teacher shortage, with teachers at all career stages leaving the profession as they struggle with significant workloads, work intensification, and a lack of perceived support (Creagh et al., 2023; Heffernan et al., 2022). The most recent National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Department of Education, 2022), aiming to address teacher shortages in Australian schools, clearly identified the need to ensure that teachers were supported. This Plan underscored the need to strengthen teachers' access to quality professional learning with teacher mentoring specifically included among its recommendations.

Teacher mentoring is heralded as a significant means of support, with a particular though not singular focus on early career teachers (ECTs) (Symeonidis et al., 2023). It is a common expectation that ECTs in Australian schools will be partnered with a mentor to assist them with their transition into the profession, and, ideally, through the early years of their careers. Concurrent to a plethora of research literature demonstrating its effectiveness in emotionally and professionally supporting ECTs (Burger et al., 2021; Shanks et al., 2020; Stanulis et al., 2019;

Reeves, Hamilton, & Onder, 2022), the potential for mentoring to be of professional learning benefit for teacher mentors is an idea that has been gaining empirical traction in the research space for some time (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Hudson, 2013).

Australian (Hudson, 2013) and international research (Kuhn et al., 2022) alike point to the potential for teacher mentoring to support the professional development of both ECTs and their mentors when both engage as learning partners and co-inquirers. Thus, within the context of this study, we define a learning partnership as a way of working through discourse that is non-hierarchical and *intentionally* promotes the learning of both mentor and ECT. For example, studies by Maor and McConney (2015) and Wong (2018) found that mentoring can be a mutual learning experience for both ECTs and mentors. Such a learning partnership, however, has been shown to be challenging to achieve (Westhuizen et al., 2020). The perception that the mentor must act as an experienced expert while the ECT should be the recipient of this accrued wisdom compromises attempts to create non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial mentoring contexts (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021).

Research has emphasised the significance of the mentoring conversation (Mena et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2022; Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005) to the learning opportunities afforded to the ECT in the mentoring process. In some cases, the role of questioning in mentoring conversations has been addressed more specifically (Pylman & Bell, 2021;

Stanulis et al., 2019). Building from that premise, this research argues that how both ECTs and mentors use questions within their conversations impacts the extent to which the intended bi-directional mentoring dynamic can be achieved. While questioning has been espoused as a mainstay of mentoring conversations (Pylman & Bell, 2021), much research has focused on the mentor's use of questioning (Pylman & Bell, 2021; Stanulis et al., 2019). There is little research available that considers the impact of questioning practices employed by the mentor *and* ECT on the achievement of rich and genuine mentoring conversations (Gadamer, 1989) that serve as a professional learning opportunity for both mentoring partners.

Drawing on Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory in conjunction with Gadamer's (1989) conceptualisation of genuine conversations and the essence of the question, this study explores the questioning practices of both ECTs and mentors. Drawing on five audio-recorded mentoring conversations, this study aimed to understand the influence of questioning patterns and approaches on opportunities for learning partnership. In the report of findings, we respond to the following research question: *How do the questioning practices of mentors and early career teachers during mentoring conversations shape the extent to which learning partnerships manifest?*

In the sections that follow, relevant research regarding current mentoring approaches and mentoring conversations for rich learning is reviewed. Then, a conceptual framework for this study is established and used to develop the methods used for this study. Next, the key findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the implications for mentoring practice in the future are outlined.

2. Shifting conceptualisations of mentoring

Research has pointed to the need to review and reimagine effective teacher mentoring practice for contemporary times (Bressman et al., 2018; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Michailidi & Stavrou, 2021). These practices move beyond traditional conceptions of the ECT as the passive recipient of the expert teachers' advice about core teaching practices and the profession (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021) to mentoring whereby there is the reciprocal exchange of knowledge between the mentor and mentees (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In such mentoring, collaborative construction and reconstruction of teaching knowledge and practices is emphasised (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021) in what is often referred to as educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

In an educative mentoring approach (Burger et al., 2021), the mentor acts as co-thinker and co-reflector to facilitate the deep learning of the ECT. In doing so, ECTs work with their mentors to think deeply about their practice and their teacher identities, thus creating opportunities for ECTs' capacity building and identity transformation (Stanulis et al., 2019). As novices to the profession, mentoring that supports the work of the ECT is critical. Importantly, many research studies have also highlighted the positive impact of mentoring on mentors themselves. According to Maor and McConney (2015), and Pylman and Bell (2021), mentoring affords mentors opportunities to challenge and shift their understandings of their own practice through the process.

The impact of mentoring on the professional development of the mentor has increasingly become an area of interest in research (Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2016; Hudson, 2013; Karathanos-Aguilar & Ervin-Kassab, 2022). For example, a 2016 study in the United States demonstrated that mentors working as co-teachers with pre-service teachers found it increased their own opportunities to reflect on their practice (Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2016). A later study by US researchers Karathanos-Aguilar and Ervin-Kassab (2022) similarly reported that mentors experienced growth in four areas: critical reflection, pedagogical renewal, in situ feedback, and application of learning to leadership roles. Other recent studies (Hollweck, 2019; Kuhn et al., 2022) reported that mentors also showed increased retention and sense of well-being, further evidencing the mutual benefits of mentoring for both mentor and ECT.

Numerous mentoring studies have amplified the importance of mutual benefit to facilitate a rich learning partnership between mentor and ECT through a process of co-inquiry to intentionally enhance the professional development of both parties (Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2016; Michailidi & Stavrou, 2021). Beutel et al. (2017) and Willis et al. (2019) both reported on one such Australian study that "positioned mentoring as an interpersonal relationship for professional support based on a process of collaborative inquiry" (Beutel et al., 2017, p. 167). Rather than tasking the mentor with improving the performance of the ECT, the mentor was positioned as a co-inquirer of practice for their mutual learning (Beutel et al., 2017). In Scotland, Robson and Mtika (2017) also conducted a study whereby ECTs and mentors used a collaborative inquiry approach to mentoring during which they explored possibilities of practice for mutual learning benefit.

Several tensions have been reported in the establishment of these learning partnerships. Co-inquiry requires that mentors, as well as mentees, be open to learning from each other and see the relationship as two-way (Stanulis et al., 2019; Robson & Mtika, 2017). Previous studies have identified that such partnerships are challenging to foster (Beutel et al., 2017), and in the face of "poor partnership" (Colvin & Ashman, 2010, p. 123), this level of mutual learning may be compromised. Significant to this point, studies on mentoring relationships (Westhuizen et al., 2020) have highlighted the role of conversations (Sheridan & Young, 2017) in developing reciprocal learning partnerships between the mentee and the mentor.

3. Mentoring conversations as spaces for mutual learning

There is growing evidence that mentoring conversations, and how they occur, are critically important to the subsequent development of ECTs' teaching practice (Mena et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2022; Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005), with Tillema and Orland-Barak (2006, p. 1) stating that "conversation and dialogue are at the core of knowledge construction". Tillema and Orland-Barak (2006) determined divergent conversations enabled debate about an idea, convergent dialogue yielded shared problem-solving and parallel dialogues were constitutive of personal reflections. Several scholars argue that conversation must be underpinned by genuine and truthful interaction which remains open, non-hierarchical, and discursive in order to foster the mentee's reflection and critical thinking (Nielsen et al., 2022; van Ginkel et al., 2016).

These studies and more, however, pertain most often to mentoring conversations between school-based teachers, university staff, and pre-service teachers during feedback while on practicum (Dobrowolska & Balslev, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020; Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005; Sheridan & Young, 2017), with a specific focus on the learning gains of the pre-service teacher. There is a notable absence of literature in the ECT space, and furthermore, with a focus on the mutual learning afforded the ECT and mentor alike. For instance, Sheridan & Young, 2017 reported genuine conversation as the key enabler in effective mentoring with the focus on the learning gained by the preservice teacher. Similarly, a 2018 study in Israel by Rachamim and Orland-Barak focused on the influence of mentor patterns of talk on preservice teacher learning opportunities, with dialogue (not specifically questions) flowing to and fro between conversational participants representative of more fully participative conversations for learning.

Interestingly, Orland-Barak and Klein (2005) and much later, Orland-Barak and Wang (2021) reported the challenge of developing this kind of conversation in the practicum context, with trust, and divergent backgrounds and beliefs about mentoring proving to be barriers to consistently productive and open learning conversations. Similarly, Dobrowolska and Balslev (2017) found discursive patterns that denied preservice teachers' perceptions of their experience failed to facilitate preservice teacher learning. Importantly, these studies were not specific to ECTs nor their use of questioning.

In a few studies, the role of questioning has emerged as a key component for understanding the structure and effect of mentoring

conversations. According to Stanulis et al. (2019, p. 568), open and productive conversations are those during which the mentor uses questions that prompt mentees to verbalise "their thoughts, questions, and decisions". By doing so, Pylman and Bell (2021) suggest that the mentor supports the mentee's development as an independent thinker and actor. Again, much of the research on the use of questions as a key component of a mentoring conversation is focused on facilitating pre-service teachers' learning. For example, Jyrhama (2001) found that *why* questions helped student teachers critically discuss their own teaching practices. More recently, Erikson (2017) explored the topics preservice teachers asked questions about during mentoring sessions in Sweden. However, limited studies have considered the questioning practices of both mentors and ECTs as crucial to conversations for mutual learning benefit (Gadamer, 1989). Therefore, this study addresses this limitation.

4. Conceptual framework

Research has shown mentoring conversations to be a complex social phenomenon (Dobrowolska & Balslev, 2017), with Tillema and Orland-Barak (2006) arguing that an analysis of the content and style of mentoring conversations provides insight into the potential of mentoring practice to create opportunities for learning. In this section, we discuss positioning theory as a theoretical lens to understanding this phenomenon. We innovatively employ key tenets of Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory in conjunction with Gadamer's (1989) conception of genuine conversations as a way of thinking about ECT and mentor interactions. We now proceed to outline each of these critical ideas, followed by an explanation of the inter-relationality of these concepts as the framework used within this paper.

Positioning theory is grounded in the ontological belief that human interaction in the social world circumscribes how one will be positioned or located relative to another through any discursive exchange (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Harré (1991) explains positioning theory as a means by which to consider the "discursive production of selves" (p. 51); that is, the rights and duties that are sought and afforded to individuals, by themselves and by others, as they engage in discourse. In this way, Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) reference to self and other positioning is of particular relevance in this study, where we sought to understand how the interactions, or more specifically the use of questions, between a mentor and an ECT give rise to particular subject positions (such as expert-novice or learner-learner) in relation to one another.

Use of *position* as opposed to *role* provides the opportunity to look beyond the obviousness of roles within a mentoring conversation (in this case, a mentor and ECT role) to consider the position that is dynamically produced through the interaction. In essence, discourse (spoken words in this case) serves to act as a force that has a social outcome for the self and the other. Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) use of illocutionary force (the intended purpose of the words such as to instruct, to congratulate, to inform) and perlocutionary force (the outcome of the words) within positioning theory is particularly useful in this study to understand both the purpose and the consequence of discourse within the mentor-ECT conversation.

Gadamer's (1989) conceptualisation of genuine conversations is pertinent at this juncture. Gadamer (1989) explains genuine conversations as a way of being with each other through discourse whereby there is authenticity, genuineness, openness, and an embrace of new possibilities for understanding for each participant. Gadamer's (1989) work also differentiates between three levels of conversation. In the first, the conversation is led by one participant for the purpose of fulfilling a task, with the other positioned as respondent (Gadamer, 1989). In the second, the function of the conversation is to compete and argue one's point, without address of the other's ideas (Gadamer, 1989). In such a conversation, both participants are positioned as adversaries, defending their own point of view, and judging the other's. In the third, each is genuinely open to the views of the other and thus open to learning

something new, regardless of the official role the participant occupies (Gadamer, 1989). In positioning terms, participants are co-learners. It is this third and last level of conversation that would support bi-directional learning partnerships in mentoring relationships.

To achieve this third level of genuine conversation, synonymous with the kind of discourse that would position mentor and ECT as co-learning partners, Gadamer (1989) explains that genuine questions must be asked. Binding and Tapp (2008) explain that through genuine conversation, in which genuine questions are used,

> The conversation leads to new possibilities and new levels of understanding that were not there before the conversation took place. This is genuine conversation. Understanding that occurs is not limited to either of the respondents' previous understanding, but rather reaches beyond what either the questioner or the respondent had begun in the conversation. This is the generative nature of a conversation (p. 126).

Thus a focus on the questions used during a mentoring conversation provides a highly relevant and specific focus for our investigation. This paper will therefore consider the purpose of the questions (illocutionary force), how they position the questioner (self) and recipient of the question (other), and what the outcome of questioning is for achieving a genuine conversation (perlocutionary force). In doing so, a deeper understanding of the ways that questioning practices may be better used in the mentoring process to support a mutually beneficial approach.

4.1. Participants

The research team was comprised of academics working in Schools of Education across two universities across two Australian States. Participants in this study were recruited as part of a larger mentoring study, with ethical approval (H21REA310), with each providing written consent. The study included five mentors and five ECTs paired as mentoring partners, with the number of participants impacted by the extreme pressures on schools as they emerged from Covid-19 pandemic-driven school lockdowns. They were working in four different independent (non-government) schools, three in Queensland and one in New South Wales (the sites of the larger study), and purposively selected to represent different school contexts and mentor and ECT experience levels. These teachers were partnered by the school or were existing mentoring partners just prior to their involvement in the project. Of the five mentors, three had some experience as a mentor, and two mentors were new to the role. Participating ECTs included three first-year teachers, 1 s-year teacher, and one third-year teacher. Each mentor and ECT were allocated a pseudonym (Table 1). Gender-neutral pseudonyms and pronouns are used throughout to support anonymity.

4.2. Data collection and analysis

Mentoring partners provided a 10 - 12-min audio recording (via a link or audio file) of a mentoring conversation they considered to be typical of their usual mentoring approach. These conversations were undertaken at the participants' school sites and recorded by the mentor and ECT via tablet or mobile device. Researchers were not present to preserve the authenticity of the conversation. These recordings were

Table 1
Participant demographics.

Mentor pseudonym	Years of experience as a mentor	ECT pseudonym	Years of teaching	School
Sam	2	Dylan	1	A
Tony	4	Taylor	2	B
Jayden	<1	Leslie	1	C
Alex	6	Riley	3	A
Bailey	1	Jo	1	D

subsequently transcribed verbatim using Panopto software and then checked manually by two members of the research team for accuracy against the recording.

Three phases of analysis followed (Fig. 1). First, content analysis (Schilling, 2006) was used to describe the questioning patterns (frequency and directionality) that occurred within and across these mentoring conversations (Tables 2 and 3). The use of content analysis of latent conversational features (in this case, the use of questions) provided a quantitative description of the conversation. Counts were cross-checked by two members of the team. Second, directed qualitative content analysis (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Lindgreen et al., 2020) of question content was used to determine the purpose of questions posed by each mentoring partner (illocutionary force) and the impact on the overall positioning of mentoring partners within the conversation (perlocutionary force). Key analytical categories were identified from the literature, conceptual framework, research question, and aim (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Lindgreen et al., 2020). Each transcript served as a unit of analysis, with meaning units (in this case, questions posed) summarised, coded, and connected to these categories. In the final phase, each transcript was analysed by a member of the team followed by collaborative discussion until agreement was reached. Meaning units serving as anomalous to the predetermined categories provided the opportunity for additional categories or codes to be developed, while redundant categories or codes were removed/revised.

The findings are presented in the following section.

Table 2
Questioning patterns.

Mentoring conversation #	Mentor pseudonym	Numb of questions posed	ECT pseudonym	No. Of questions posed
1	Sam	14	Dylan	0
2	Tony	4	Taylor	12
3	Jayden	15	Leslie	17
4	Alex	28	Riley	0
5	Bailey	19	Jo	0

5. Findings

From the analysis, three kinds of questioning patterns and purposes were categorised, namely unidirectional reflection, unidirectional investigation, and bidirectional inquiry. In alignment with the aim and conceptual framing of this study, each of these categories will be presented regarding questioning frequency, directionality and purpose, and the impact on mentor and ECT positioning within the conversation with regard to learning.

The following table (Table 2), referred to throughout the following sections, shows the frequency and directionality of questioning between mentors and ECTs in each of their conversations. These frequency counts reveal who of each mentoring pair had the greatest control over questioning and the extent of each participant's questioning contributions.
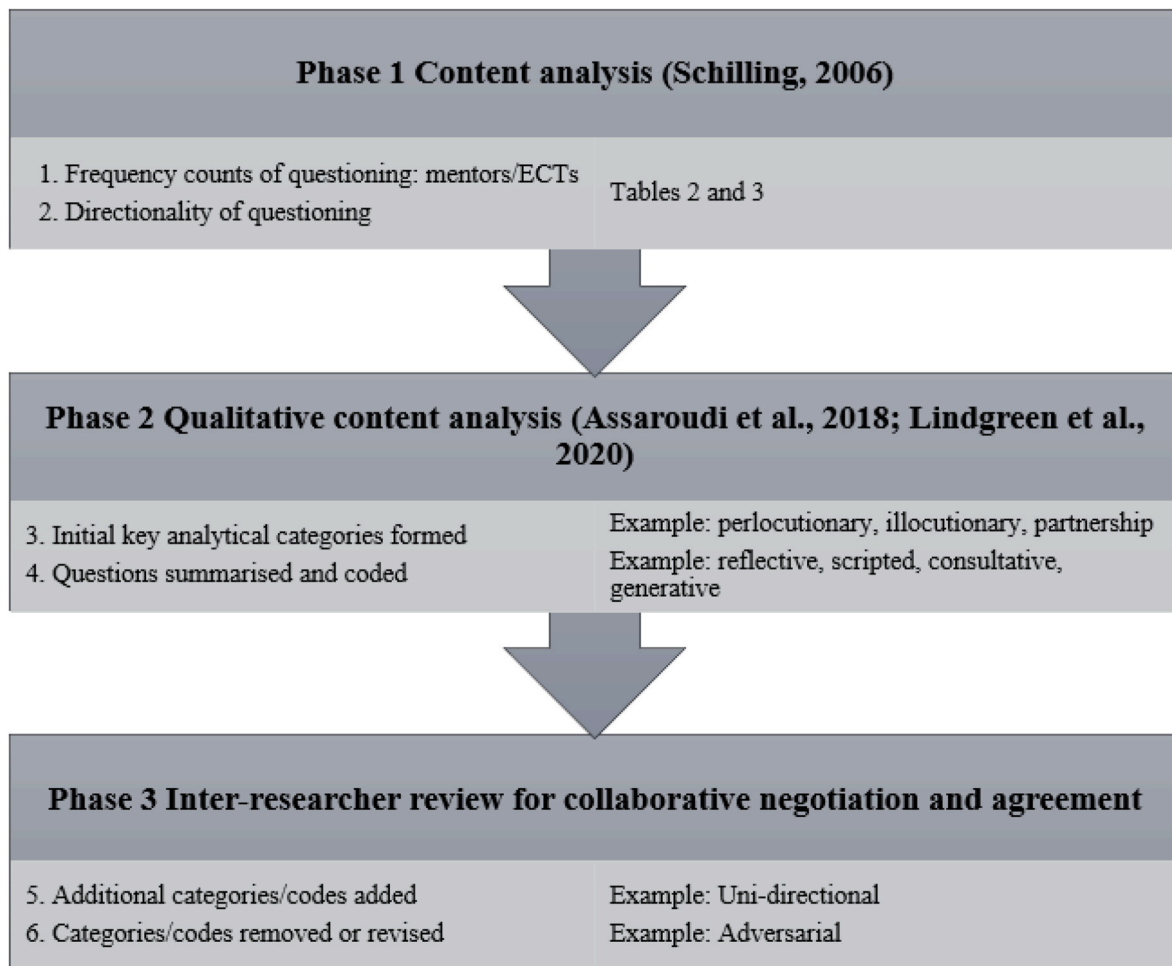

Phase 1 Content analysis (Schilling, 2006)

1. Frequency counts of questioning: mentors/ECTs
2. Directionality of questioning

Tables 2 and 3

Phase 2 Qualitative content analysis (Assaroudi et al., 2018; Lindgreen et al., 2020)

3. Initial key analytical categories formed
4. Questions summarised and coded

Example: perlocutionary, illocutionary, partnership
Example: reflective, scripted, consultative, generative

Phase 3 Inter-researcher review for collaborative negotiation and agreement

5. Additional categories/codes added
6. Categories/codes removed or revised

Example: Uni-directional
Example: Adversarial

Fig. 1. Method of analysis.

Table 3
Summary of findings.

Directionality of questioning		Illocutionary force of questioning	Perlocutionary Force		Example conversation
			Positioning (Harré) M-ECT	Conversation level (Gadamer, 1989)	
Unidirectional	M→ECT	To facilitate ECT reflection	Facilitator-reflector	Level 1	#4
Unidirectional	M→ECT	To obtain information	Interviewer (investigator)-interviewee	Level 1	#1 and #5
Unidirectional	ECT→M	To obtain information	Consultant-Consumer	Level 1	#2
Bi-directional	M→ECT M←ECT	To access and deepen one another's understanding	Co-learners (Learning partnership)	Level 3	#3

5.1. Uni-directional reflection

In conversation #4 (see excerpt below), Alex, the most experienced mentor of the participants, worked with Riley, also the most experienced ECT in their third year of teaching. In this instance, Alex posed 28 questions to their ECT Riley during the recorded conversation. In turn, Riley did not pose any questions to their mentor. Thus, the mentor controlled the conversation in terms of questioning contribution, and the conversation was unidirectional in this regard. Many of Alex's questions facilitated the reflective thinking of the ECT about their own practice, such as, "How did you feel that went?" and "Why do you think you did it that way?". On a number of occasions, Alex followed up with short prompts such as "Can you tell me more?" to encourage Riley to consider their response further. In doing so, the mentor positioned themselves as the facilitator of the conversation and the ECT (Riley) took on the position of respondent, sharing their sense-making of their own teaching experiences.

To illustrate, after recapping the meeting prior, Alex commenced by asking Riley about a recent teacher observation:

Alex: How did you find the observation? What did you glean from that?

Riley: So I ended up focussing on how to keep particular students settled at carpet time when there's teaching on the rug. That was really helpful to observe the different strategies that [teacher] was using. And she had a few go-to response strategies that I hadn't used before, so that was helpful. She would often regroup them or she would sit with them or work particularly with them beside her.

Alex: I'm hearing there is that you're able to glean some engagement strategies. Was there anything else?

Riley: Yeah, there was one thing in particular that I found really helpful called quick observations. You actually just observe the class and how they are responding to the lesson …. So I think we'll keep trialling that, let's see how they go.

Alex: What are you hoping to get out of this?

Riley did not challenge their positioning as the respondent by asking questions of the mentor, such as How would you do this? Why might this have happened? What else do you know about this issue? Further, Alex did not indicate that their questions were posed to seek new learning for themselves, such as "I'm interested in knowing how to do these quick observations. Can you tell me more?" While the mentor did engage in careful paraphrasing indicating their attentiveness to the conversation, such as:

> What I'm hearing from you is that you know what? You can control some things, others that you can't control, but these things that I can do so I'm going to do this as a result. (Alex #4)

The ECT appeared to be positioned as the intended learner while the mentor claimed the position of facilitator.

This conversation is very indicative of an educative mentoring approach and may effectively move ECTs to a reflective space. However, such a conversation falls short of the kind of genuine conversation described by Gadamer (1989) that constitutes a learning partnership. Such a conversation would require both conversants to authentically grapple with an idea, seeking to understand it more fully and challenging their thinking using the resources of both mentoring participants.

5.2. Uni-directional investigation

Three of the conversations were categorised as uni-directional and investigative in nature, with #1 and #5 controlled by the mentor, and #2 controlled by the ECT. In the case of conversations #1 and #5, mentors Sam and Bailey, who were both early in their mentoring roles, asked 14 and 19 questions of their ECTs respectively. In contrast, their ECTs (Dylan and Jo, both first-year teachers), asked no questions in return. Again, questioning was controlled by the mentors creating uni-directional conversations in this regard. Of significance, these mentors were focused on ensuring that mentoring protocols were followed, constituted of a predetermined sequence of questions to be asked by the mentor.

In these protocols, the ECT is not assigned questions to ask of the mentor, and therefore, a unidirectional questioning pattern emerges. Whereas in the previous conversation, the mentor supplements questions with provocative prompts to move the ECT to further thinking, in these conversations, questions are asked with what could be called excessive fidelity. Once the ECT responds, the mentor moves on to the next listed question, as seen in the following excerpt where Jo talks about their previous goal to gather feedback on their teaching from students:

Bailey: What successes and struggles have you had and why?

Jo: Um, so, my previous goal was to gather student feedback, and so I didn't have too much success with it. I really didn't get much. You know, end of term.

Bailey: No, that's fair.

Jo: But I think I'm trying to implement what they said they enjoyed and what they said about their lives, what they want to improve on too.

Bailey: Okay. All right. Excellent. And so one hurdle that you overcame in the last few weeks and how this was managed?

Mentor questions posed lack the authenticity that comes with genuine curiosity (Gadamer, 1989), and in approaching the conversation as a task with a series of set steps to be accomplished, opportunities to create a genuine learning opportunity for both participants are limited. To illustrate, at one point later in the conversation, Bailey apologised, stating, "Oh, sorry, I've missed a question". The mentoring conversation between Sam and Dylan offers another case in point. In this part of the conversation, Dylan thinks about the challenge they are having with behaviour management:

Sam: So, something that you think you need help with right now moving into the next few weeks?

Dylan: Behaviour, managing my class.

Sam: So are there particular things that you've noticed in your class just in the last few weeks that have caused you to feel that way?

Dylan: I've got quite a few that are just those calling out kids that just don't stop, you know. And it's like you say one thing and then they have something to say back to you.

Sam: Yeah. Okay. So just that level of disrespect? So, is it something

really specific that we could look at as far as behaviour management?

Dylan: I think I need to be more on top of my rewards, like rewarding my kids. I've just been really slack because the majority of them are doing the wrong thing.

Sam: So narrowing it down, what do you think would be achievable within the next three weeks?

Dylan: I could bring back those rewards 'cause it does work? Especially when I have it where they can see …

Sam: Yes, the visual works really well. How would you rate your well-being on a scale of 1–10, um, just these last few weeks?

While Sam engaged in some questions to provoke Dylan to engage in some personal reflection about their practice, Sam's concern with getting back on track with the set questions undermined opportunities to follow the conversation to see what learning could emerge. Consequently, the mentors position themselves as interviewers, working their way through their questions to obtain information from the ECT with less regard for responding to the natural direction of the conversation. ECTs accepted the position of interviewee afforded them and did not ask any questions that would take the conversation off-script. Opportunities for mutual inquiry of ideas, assumptions, or understanding were absent.

While continuing to be largely unidirectional, questioning in conversation #2 was, in this instance, largely dominated by the ECT. In this conversation, the ECT (Taylor) posed 12 questions to their mentor compared to 4 questions asked by the mentor (Tony). During this conversation, Taylor posed questions that demanded the mentor "give" or "tell" information. For example, in this conversation focused on inclusion practices that must be undertaken in the classroom, Taylor asked questions focused on what needed to be done, how, and when. In this instance, Taylor had been teaching for two years and Tony was relatively experienced as a mentor of four years. The ECT's questioning approach positioned the mentor as expert and the ECT as the consumer of this expertise.

To illustrate, in the following conversation, Taylor seeks clarification after a meeting the previous day on recording instructional adjustments for students:

Taylor: I'm just a little overwhelmed, like the data we have to collect for [organisation]. Like I feel like I'm kind of like overthinking it a little bit. Do you need to do this for every student?

Tony: No. So for instance, in your class, you've got … … and you can still adjust to a unit plan.

Taylor: Then you would write those things down?

Tony: Yeah. Underneath …

Taylor: I collect some really good data. How much do I need?

Tony: Don't overdo it, but you need to have enough to show you can justify what they need.

In this instance, the mentor did not challenge the positioning afforded them through the ECT's questions, with the few questions posed by the mentor primarily used to check that their response had been adequate. Despite topics arising that could have been inquired into, such as the issue of data collection, the lack of mutual questioning delimited the potential for alternative learning to emerge for both parties.

5.3. Bi-directional inquiry

Jayden (mentor), while an experienced teacher, was the most inexperienced of all the mentors, and Leslie (ECT) was in their first year of teaching. They had a very different conversation (conversation #3) from those of the other mentoring pairs. In this instance, Jayden asked 15 questions, and Leslie asked 17. Thus, their questioning was bi-directional, with both asking questions of the other in relatively equal quantities. In doing so, they created equity of contribution and shared control over the conversation in this regard, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Jayden: So what's been happening?

Leslie: So, I tried using role play with the Year 8 maths class.

Jayden: Really … that is amazing to try that. How did you go about it?

Leslie: We're doing 'interest' so they were in pairs and I had them take on the role of financial planners and customers. They had fun, but it was pretty chaotic.

Jayden: Can you tell me about the lesson first, 'cause that is such a cool approach?

Leslie: For sure. It was cool. I got the idea from my friend …

Jayden: But how do you introduce it?

Leslie: I had them watch a video that showed …. But in the end, they just couldn't be serious. How do you get them to take it seriously?

Jayden: Maybe the space you were doing it in needs to be different. I think that it needs to look like the real setting. Is there a way to set it up like a.a bank or something?

Leslie: Maybe if we went to the library area?

These questions were authentic and generative in nature, and both appeared willing to move with the conversation as opportunities for further investigation arose for either or both of them. The mentor showed genuine curiosity about the ECT's practice, and they appeared to have an expectation that they both had valuable information to contribute to the conversation and used questions to access this. Further in the conversation, their mutual learning continued.

Leslie: Is there like a drama routine or, um, something that I could use, just to you know, stop them from … ? I've used a signal prop before but that was at uni.

Jayden: Great idea about the prop. What about a sound of some kind to show when the role-play stops and starts?

They positioned one another as learners and achieved a conversation that was non-hierarchical and mutual.

It is recognised that, through any given conversation, mentoring partners may move to varying extents between these questioning patterns and purposes. In our study, however, we found that in each case, there was a predominance of one of these categories that has been identified as the exemplar conversation (Table 3).

We now turn to a discussion of these findings.

6. Discussion

The findings from this study draw attention to the significant influence of questioning on mentors' and ECTs' positioning and related ability to engage in the kind of conversation that Gadamer (1989) would describe as genuine; that is, a way of being with each other through discourse whereby there is authenticity, genuineness, openness, and an embrace of new possibilities for understanding for each participant. Previous research on mentoring conversations has recognised mentoring as having the potential to be mutually beneficial (Robson & Mtika, 2017), yet the challenges of attaining this kind of conversation are well noted (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021; Westhuizen et al., 2020). While most research has focused on how mentors use questioning during mentoring conversations (Stanulis et al., 2019; Pylman and Bell, 2021), this study contributes a clearer understanding of how questioning is used, or not, by both mentor and ECT to achieve a learning partnership that works through non-hierarchical, mutual, and authentic mentoring conversations that serve as a platform for co-learning.

Previous studies have considered the different styles of conversation used by mentors (Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018), but without specific regard for questioning patterns of both mentor and ECT. The mentoring conversations in this study demonstrated a range of ways in which questioning can be deployed by mentor and ECT. In most instances, questioning was dominated by one of the pair, with a considerable disparity between the frequency of questions asked by each. Consequently, either the mentor or ECT was positioned as largely in control of the direction and purpose (illocutionary force) of the mentoring conversation. The questions they chose to pose demanded a particular position be adopted by the other (perlocutionary force). In the absence of any counter-questioning, opportunities to challenge this positioning were limited.

For instance, Riley was the recipient of Alex's reflective questioning, with Alex controlling the conversation in this regard. Differently from Jones et al. (2017) description of the monologic mentor conversation more broadly, this study refers to the dominance of questioning specifically. Although Riley was provided with an important reflective opportunity (Tonna et al., 2017), the unidirectional pattern of questioning employed prevented an intentional address of learning for the mentor and reinforced the mentor's position of power.

Three of the conversations were investigative in nature, whereby questioning was largely purposed to gather specific information. For example, Sam and Bailey as mentors both used investigative-style questioning to gather information from their ECT, which limited the ways the ECTs could direct the conversation. In these instances, the interviewer-like positioning of the mentor compromised the extent to which a genuine conversation could emerge. In a different way, Tony (mentor) was positioned by their ECT as the expert, or in a consultancy role. Without the use of counter-questioning, Tony's positioning was maintained throughout the conversation. As such, the opportunity to explore new learning or take the conversation in a richer direction was undermined. Research has previously reported the propensity of mentors to adopt the sage position in mentoring (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021), yet there has been little consideration of how ECT questioning may position the mentor in this way. In this study, the ECT controlled the questioning for the purpose of extracting specific information from the mentor.

This is not to say that such conversations lack value. Significant research demonstrates the value of mentors' use of reflective questioning for building instructional capacity (Tonna et al., 2017) and developing productive professional learner identities of ECTs (Larsen & Allen, 2021). Further, conversations in which ECTs are provided with specific information serve a practicable function, where unfamiliar processes, contextual information and specific skills need to be understood (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Björk et al., 2019). Thus, it is not a matter of dismissing the value of these kinds of conversations; but rather understanding that such questioning patterns and approaches may not provide the conditions for the mentor and ECT to be positioned as genuine learning partners.

In contrast, Jayden and Leslie engaged in bi-directional questioning patterns with relatively equal frequency of contribution in this regard. Their approach to questioning positioned both themselves and one another as co-inquirers, using one another's questioning to progress the conversation. Their balanced questioning enabled each to learn from the other. While previous studies have considered the mentor to be critical to the kind of discourse that emerges within a mentoring conversation (Rachamim & Orland-Barak, 2018), this study showed the equally critical role of the ECT in supporting such a learning partnership to emerge. Specific to this study, questioning that is balanced in frequency and directionality supports the richness and depth that Gadamer (1989) refers to as a genuine learning conversation and the kind of "joint experience of dialogue" that Nahmad-Williams and Taylor, 2015, p. 185) argue is needed for mentoring that is mutually productive.

From a positioning theory perspective, it is important to note that within each of these conversations, neither the mentor nor the ECT challenged the positioning afforded them by the other. According to Harré and van Langenhove's (1999), individuals will accept, adapt or reject these positions offered through social exchange. In this instance, the position occupied by the mentoring partner who controlled the questioning within the conversation went largely uncontested. For example, Riley (ECT) accepted that their role was to reflect on their own practice but did not seek to reposition the facilitatory positioning of the mentor by asking similarly reflective questions of them. Jo and Dylan did not engage in any questioning that may have repositioned the investigative role assumed by their mentor. Tony, as mentor, accepted Taylor's positioning of them as expert and did not pursue counter-questioning that may have shifted their positioning in this conversation. Jayden and Leslie afforded one another and concurrently accepted their positioning as learning partners. Several reasons are posited for this positional compliance.

In the case of ECTs, there may be, firstly, a limited sense of agency (Steadman, 2021) to challenge a positioning afforded them in a mentoring conversation. ECTs have been shown to feel that they should follow the lead of their mentor in the mentoring process (Larsen & Allen, 2021). Specific to this study, ECTs were unlikely to unsettle the directionality or purpose of the questioning patterns of the mentor. Secondly, ECTs are also rarely trained in mentoring techniques, with most research concerned with the capabilities of the mentor (Beutel et al., 2017). Given that this study shows the instrumental role of ECTs in nurturing these kinds of conversations, a lack of training for ECTs could compromise their ability to redirect the pattern of questioning in ways that can support the development of more genuine, mutually beneficial learning partnerships.

Some mentors in this study showed a strong reliance on very structured protocols to frame their mentoring conversation. Such protocols have proven useful to mentors, particularly where mentoring may be a new role for them (Tillema and Orland-Barak, 2006). In this study, Sam and Bailey were relatively inexperienced mentors, and as such, may have been most comfortable following the set questions quite closely. However, in working this way, achieving Gadamer's (1989) genuine conversation and learning partnership became challenging. Interestingly, the most experienced mentor of the study also engaged in uni-directional questioning. Though strongly educative (Burger et al., 2021) in nature, this conversation also lacked the kind of learning partnership to which we refer in this study. Further to this, the least experienced mentor and ECT (Jayden and Leslie) engaged in the conversation that most reflected a non-hierarchical, open, and genuine conversation aimed at the learning benefit of both parties. Thus, this study would indicate that the extent to which genuine conversations as learning partners can be achieved may not necessarily be predicated on mentoring experience, but rather on mentor and ECT understanding of how questioning can and should be enacted to this end.

7. Implications for the future

The findings from this study have implications in three ways. First, findings suggest the need to reconsider how mentoring for mutual learning is characterised and how it can be effectuated. Second, we argue a shift from targeting mentors as the lone recipients of professional learning about how mentoring should be conducted. Third, this study points to a need to re-evaluate the kinds of resources and supports that assist mentors and ECTs to engage in mentoring conversations that are genuine and authentically mutual.

In more recent times, educative mentoring, a process largely constitutive of mentor questioning, has been heralded as the approach that will support ECTs to develop the kinds of reflective capacities essential to their development as teachers (Burger et al., 2021) and consequently, support mentor learning (Karathanos-Aguilar & Ervin-Kassab, 2022). Our findings indicate, however, that learning partnerships require both the ECT and mentor to take mutual responsibility for the learning of the other. Our study has shown the importance of questioning that is shared and bidirectional to achieve this end, shifting the focus from the questioning approach of mentors to the questioning approaches of both mentor and ECT.

Related to this, findings would indicate a necessary reconsideration of the way in which professional learning for mentoring is delivered to include both mentors and ECTs in understanding how to "mentor". Genuine conversations are underpinned by a non-hierarchical positioning as co-learners (Gadamer, 1989). This work has demonstrated how shared responsibility for questioning, or balanced questioning, abets such co-positioning. In short, if learning partnerships rely on the shared contributions of both parties through questioning, then both parties should be empowered with this knowledge, regardless of their official role in the conversation or teaching or mentoring experience,

through professional learning.

Furthermore, caution must be exercised in the resources and tools developed to support mentors and ECTs to engage productively as learning partners. Protocols (outlining conversational structures or procedures) that are mentor-centric (that is, focus on questions the mentor asks) may inhibit opportunities for ECTs' ability to contribute questions as part of a genuine conversation. Further, mentors may feel compelled to maintain mentor-centric questioning practices out of fidelity to a given protocol. Our findings suggest that a less rigid protocol may better serve genuine conversations and balanced questioning, and further to this, one that also acknowledges the contribution of questions by the ECT as crucial to learning partnerships.

The significance of the findings withstanding, the authors acknowledge that this study is not without limitations, and the findings must be read with these in mind. Firstly, the sample of recorded mentoring conversations is small, and therefore may not be representative of the wide range of mentoring conversations in which mentors and ECTs engage or indicative of other positions adopted within these conversations. Second, the participants may also not represent the full range of mentors and ECTs actively at work in the mentoring space in schools. Our study was limited to a sample of mentors and ECTs in one sector of Australian schools, and we, therefore, encourage further research in alternative contexts and the adoption of alternate methodological and theoretical approaches that may extend upon our work. Last, we draw attention to the timing of this study, whereby schools were still experiencing the aftermath of pandemic-related school stressors; we thus support further research that may offer insight into how or if this influenced the study findings.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the influence of mentor *and* ECT questioning on the extent to which learning partnerships could manifest during a mentoring conversation. In the context of this study, we defined a learning partnership as a non-hierarchical way of interacting through discourse between a mentor and ECT that intentionally generates new learning for both parties. In this paper, we reported on findings from the content and qualitative content analysis of five audio-recorded mentoring conversations involving ECTs and mentors working in four Australian schools. Findings indicate that shared or balanced contribution of questions by both mentor and ECT positions both as learning partners and is essential to the attainment of genuine, non-hierarchical, and intentionally mutual learning conversations.

As such, this study has offered a reconsidered perspective of what may be required to attain learning partnership through mentoring. Using the innovative lens of positioning theory in conjunction with Gadamer's conceptualisation of genuine conversations, learning partnerships have been assembled as constitutive of mutual and equitable contributions of questions that flow authentically between mentor and ECT as they seek to learn from one another. This shifts primary questioning responsibility from the mentor to become the responsibility of both, thus having implications for how we characterise learning partnerships, the way in which professional learning is provided, and the kinds of supports and tools we offer mentors and ECTs to guide mentoring conversations for this purpose.

These theoretically-driven findings have clear practical application for schools and other stakeholders involved in the delivery and development of mentoring programs across education settings, and more broadly, school systems. Importantly, Australia is not unique in the current challenges faced by teachers in their work. Rapidly evolving and escalating educational demands and expectations for ECTs and their more experienced colleagues are the experience of teachers in many other countries (Creagh et al., 2023; Heffernan et al., 2022). Understanding ways to optimise mentoring practices that serve as genuinely mutually beneficial learning experiences for both ECT and mentor will contribute to an address of these current challenges.

Declaration of competing interest

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome. We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. We further confirm that the order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by all of us. We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property. In so doing we confirm that we have followed the regulations of our institutions concerning intellectual property. We further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies and that such approvals are acknowledged within the manuscript. We understand that the Corresponding Author is the sole contact for the Editorial process (including Editorial Manager and direct communications with the office). He/she is responsible for communicating with the other authors about progress, submissions of revisions, and final approval of proofs. We confirm that we have provided a current, correct email address which is accessible by the Corresponding Author.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

References

Aspfors, J., & Fransson, G. (2015). Research on mentor education for mentors of newly qualified teachers: A qualitative meta-synthesis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 48*, 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.02.004

Assarroudi, A., Heshmati Nabavi, F., Armat, M. R., Ebadi, A., & Vaismoradi, M. (2018). Directed qualitative content analysis: The description and elaboration of its underpinning methods and data analysis process. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 23* (1), 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987117741667

Beutel, D., Crosswell, L., Willis, J., Spooner-Lane, R., Curtis, E., & Churchward, P. (2017). Preparing teachers to mentor beginning teachers: An Australian case study. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 6*(3), 164–177. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-04-2017-0030

Binding, L. L., & Tapp, D. M. (2008). Human understanding in dialogue: Gadamer's recovery of the genuine. *Nursing Philosophy, 9*, 121–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-769X.2007.00338.x

Björk, L., Stengård, J., Söderberg, M., Andersson, E., & Wastensson, G. (2019). Beginning teachers' work satisfaction, self-efficacy and willingness to stay in the profession: A question of job demands-resources balance? *Teachers and Teaching, 25*(8), 955–971. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1688288

Bressman, S., Winter, J. S., & Efron, S. E. (2018). Next generation mentoring: Supporting teachers beyond induction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 73*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.04.003

Burger, J., Bellhaeuser, H., & Imhof, M. (2021). Mentoring styles and novice teachers' well-being: The role of basic need satisfaction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 103*, Article 103345. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103345

Colvin, J., & Ashman, M. (2010). Roles, risks, and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 18*, 121–134.

Creagh, S., Thompson, G., Mockler, N., Stacey, M., & Hogan, A. (2023). Workload, work intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: A systematic research synthesis. *Educational Review*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x

Department of Education. (2022). *The national teacher Workforce action plan*. https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan.

Dobrowolska, D., & Balslev, K. (2017). Discursive mentoring strategies and interactional dynamics in teacher education. *Linguistics and Education, 42*, 10–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.09.001

Ellis, N. J., Alonzo, D., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2020). Elements of a quality pre-service teacher mentor: A literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 92*, Article 103072. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103072

Eriksson, Anita (2017). Pre-service teachers' questions about the profession during mentoring group conversations. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(1), 76–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1251901

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). Helping novices learn to teach: Lessons from an exemplary support teacher. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(1), 17–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/002248710105200100

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2012). Beyond solo teaching. *Educational Leadership, 69*(8), 10–16.

Gadamer, H. G. (1989). *Truth and method. Continuum*.

Gallo-Fox, J., & Scantlebury, K. (2016). Coteaching as professional development for cooperating teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 60*, 191–202. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.007

Ghosh, R., & Reio, T. G. (2013). Career benefits associated with mentoring for mentors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 83*(1), 106–116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.03.011

van Ginkel, G., Verloop, N., & Denessen, E. (2016). Why mentor? Linking mentor teachers' motivations to their mentoring conceptions. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 22*(1), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1023031

Harré, R. (1991). The discursive production of selves. *Theory & Psychology, 1*(1), 51–63. https://doi-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.1177/0959354391011004.

Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (Eds.). (1999). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action. Blackwell*.

Heffernan, A., Bright, D., Kim, M., Longmuir, F., & Magyar, B. (2022). 'I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession. *Australian Journal of Education, 66*(2), 196–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221086654

Hollweck, T. (2019). I love this stuff!: A Canadian case study of mentor-coach well-being. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 8*(4), 325–344. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-02-2019-0036

Hudson, P. (2013). Mentoring as professional development: 'Growth for both' mentor and mentee. *Professional Development in Education, 39*(5), 771–783. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.749415

Jones, Luke, Tones, Steven, Foulkes, Gethin, & Jones, Rhys C. (2021). Associate Teachers' views on dialogic mentoring. *Teachers and Teaching, 27*(1-4), 181–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1933421

Jyrhama, R. (2001). *What are the "right" questions and the "right" answers in teaching practice supervision? ERIC clearinghouse*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED457159.

Karathanos-Aguilar, K., & Ervin-Kassab, L. (2022). Co-teaching as an opportunity for mentor teacher professional growth. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 11*(3), 245–261. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-06-2021-0070

Kuhn, C., Hagenauer, G., & Gröschner, A. (2022). "Because you always learn something new yourself!" An expectancy-value-theory perspective on mentor teachers' initial motivations. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 113*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103659

Larsen, E., & Allen, J. M. (2021). Circumventing erosion of professional learner identity development among beginning teachers. *Teaching Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.2011193

Lindgreen, B., Lundman, B., & Graneheim, U. H. (2020). Abstraction and interpretation during the qualitative content analysis process. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 108*, 103632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2020.103632, 103632.

Maor, D., & McConney, A. (2015). Wisdom of the elders: Mentors' perspectives on mentoring learning environments for beginning science and mathematics teachers. *Learning Environments Research, 18*(3), 335–347. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9187-0

Mena, J., Hennissen, P., & Loughran, J. (2017). Developing pre-service teachers' professional knowledge of teaching: The influence of mentoring. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 66*, 47–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.024

Michailidi, E., & Stavrou, D. (2021). Mentoring in-service teachers on implementing innovative teaching modules. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 105*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103414

Nahmad-Williams, L., & Taylor, C. A. (2015). Experimenting with dialogic mentoring: A new model. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 4*(3), 184–199. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-04-2015-0013

Nielsen, W., Tindall-Ford, S., & Sheridan, L. (2022). Mentoring conversations in preservice teacher supervision: Knowledge for mentoring in categories of participation. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 30*(1), 38–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2022.2030185

Orland-Barak, L., & Klein, S. (2005). The expressed and the realized: Mentors' representations of a mentoring conversation and its realization in practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(4), 379–402. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.05.003

Orland-Barak, L., & Wang, J. (2021). Teacher mentoring in service of preservice teachers' learning to teach: Conceptual bases, Characteristics,and challenges for teacher education reform. *Journal of Teacher Education, 72*(1), 86–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119894230

Pylman, S., & Bell, J. (2021). Levels of mentor questioning in assisted performance: What mentors should ask student teachers while co-planning. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 29*(5), 522–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2021.1986796

Rachamim, M., & Orland-Barak, L. (2018). When style meets pattern in mentoring talk: Implications for student teacher community learning environments in practice teaching. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48*(5), 657–675. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1401587

Reeves, T. D., Hamilton, V., & Onder, Y. (2022). Which teacher induction practices work? Linking forms of induction to teacher practices, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 109*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103546

Robson, D., & Mtika, P. (2017). Newly qualified teachers' professional learning through practitioner enquiry: Investigating partnership-based mentoring. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 6*(3), 242–260. https://doi-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.1108/IJMCE-03-2017-0027.

Sandmeier, A., Baeriswyl, S., Krause, A., & Muehlhausen, J. (2022). Work until you drop: Effects of work overload, prolonging working hours, and autonomy need satisfaction on exhaustion in teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 111*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103843

Schilling, J. (2006). On the pragmatics of qualitative assessment. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 22*(1), 28–37. https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759.22.1.28

Shanks, R., Attard Tonna, M., Krøjgaard, F., Paaske, K. A., Robson, D., & Bjerkholt, E. (2020). A comparative study of mentoring for new teachers. *Professional Development in Education, 48*(5), 751–765. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1744684

Sheridan, L., & Young, M. (2017). Genuine conversation: The enabler in good mentoring of pre-service teachers. *Teachers and Teaching, 23*(6), 658–673. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1218327

Stanulis, R. N., Wexler, L. J., Pylman, S., Guenther, A., Farver, S., Ward, A., Croel-Perrien, A., & White, K. (2019). Mentoring as more than "cheerleading": Looking at educative mentoring practices through mentors' eyes. *Journal of Teacher Education, 70*(5), 567–580. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487118773996

Steadman, S. (2021). Conflict, transition and agency: Reconceptualising the process of learning to teach. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 107*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103475

Symeonidis, V., Haas, E., & Schneider, K. (2023). Personal, social and professional support for newly qualified teachers: Teacher induction in Austria. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 121*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103916

Tillema, H., & Orland-Barak, L. (2006). Constructing knowledge in professional conversations: The role of beliefs on knowledge and knowing. *Learning and Instruction, 16*(6), 592–608. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2006.10.006

Tonna, Michelle Attard, Bjerkholt, Eva, & Holland, Eimear (2017). Teacher mentoring and the reflective practitioner approach. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 6*(3), 210–227. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-04-2017-0032

Westhuizen, G. J., Pretorius, A. J. M., & Tillema, H. H. (2020). Learning trouble in mentoring conversations. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 38*(2), 167–181. https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2020.1807371

Willis, J., Churchward, P., Beutel, D., Spooner-Lane, R., Crosswell, L., & Curtis, E. (2019). Mentors for beginning teachers as middle leaders: The messy work of recontextualising. *School Leadership & Management, 39*(3–4), 334–351. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1555701

Wong, J. L. N. (2018). Why social capital is important for mentoring capacity building of mentors: A case study in Hong Kong. *Teachers and Teaching, 24*(6), 706–718. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1456419