Mentoring Novice Special Education Teachers: A Case Study of Educative Mentors’ Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

MENTORING NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATIVE MENTORS’ PERCEPTIONS

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Northern Illinois University, 2022
Elizabeth Wilkins, Dissertation Director

Special education continues to be plagued with a shortage of qualified special education teachers (SETs). Novice SETs in their beginning years often do not have individualized mentoring support to grow as educators. However, educative mentors can provide scaffolded support and learning opportunities for novice SETs to develop their teaching practice. This case study examined perceptions of two educative mentors on what knowledge and skills are required to support novice SETs when solving problems of practice. Three main findings emerged: a) mentors should foster the development of novice SETs’ self-reflection skills, b) mentors should have content knowledge which includes instructional strategies and completing IEP paperwork, and c) mentors must establish trusting relationships with novice SETs. Recommendations for educative mentors practice are shared in this study. As additional research on educative mentoring for novice SETs does not currently exist suggestions for further research are included.
MENTORING NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATIVE MENTORS’ PERCEPTIONS

BY

SHERRY BOCHENEK
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
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I want to thank my mom, dad, and sister for showing me that no matter what barriers life throws at you just keep moving forward and doing it with a sense of humor. Getting to the finish line might take a little longer than you anticipate, but you must keep going and laugh along the way even if it’s at yourself.

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Finally, I would like to thank Nancy and Isabelle, the mentor teachers in this study. Your willingness to participate in this study and candidness in your words cannot be understated. I appreciate you and the passion you have for helping others.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to novice special education teachers everywhere. Whether you are just beginning your career or moving to a new school to teach, you are a novice. You deserve quality mentoring to support the extremely difficult yet rewarding job you do daily.

My hope for all novice special education teachers is you are given a life preserver on your first day in the classroom instead of the expectation to sink or swim on your own.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The shortage of special education teachers (SETs) has been a formidable concern in education since 1990, with an increasing number of classrooms lacking qualified SETs (Boe, 2006; Boe et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Consequently, this shortage of SETs is leaving students with disabilities without sufficient support (Boe, 2006; Boe et al., 1998; Boe et al., 2012). Due to this shortage, schools often find themselves having to hire teachers who do not hold appropriate credentials or training (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Moreover, high attrition rates among SETs contribute to the shortage because of insufficient training, inadequate support from school leadership, isolation, and lack of instructional or curricular support (Billingsley, 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2010). Collectively, shortages of SETs, coupled with higher-than-desired attrition rates, warrant attention so the achievement of a population of already vulnerable students is not further at risk (Boe et al., 1998; Sutcher et al.).

One way to address SET attrition is by providing novice SETs with support in their beginning years of teaching through induction and mentoring programs. Ingersoll and Smith’s (2004) nationwide study of 50,000+ participants found that novice teachers who received support through an induction program were less likely to leave their school after their first year of teaching. Providing all novice teachers, both SETs and general education teachers (GETs), with induction support also improves teacher learning (Bullough, 2012). Currently, there is no
definitive common framework for induction programs for novice teachers, and many different models exist. However, research does suggest that certain common characteristics are consistent in activities and assistance that comprise an effective induction program (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Griffin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009). One of the most cited components is assistance of a mentor (Algozzine et al., 2007; Billingsley et al.; White & Mason, 2006) which is generally a more experienced teacher providing assistance to a novice teacher (Ingersoll & Smith).

Washburn-Moses (2010) stated that SETs and GETs generally participate in the same types of mentoring programs, however, she argues that SETs’ unique needs necessitate unique mentoring.

When considering the kind of mentoring appropriate for novice SETs, it is necessary to examine roles and responsibilities of SETs compared to GETs, since often SETs spend a significant amount of time and effort on portions of their jobs that differ from GETs (Youngs et al., 2011). Generally, SETs must have the same curricular knowledge that GETs do. However, SETs must be able to adapt their instruction, modify curricular resources, and provide accommodations because students’ skill levels can vary quite dramatically (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2004; Billingsley et al., 2009; Urbach et al., 2015; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al.). Billingsley et al. found that induction supports for SETs should be tailored to meet their unique needs. In so doing, parts of the SET role that differ from GETs can be addressed. Educative mentoring is an induction support that can provide SETs with the individualized assistance they need.

As defined by Feiman-Nemser (2001), educative mentoring is a particular type of support given to novice teachers by a mentor that promotes inquiry and reflection on a novice teacher’s practice through experiences within novice teachers’ own classrooms. Focus of educative mentoring is not just professional and emotional support, but rather mentoring that goes beyond
these functions to include growth-producing experiences by the mentor that cultivates a sense of inquiry for the novice teacher (Feiman-Nemser). For example, mentor teachers can help novice teachers reflect on their teaching practice by asking novice teachers what they think went well and what did not go well during a reading lesson. An educative mentor can then help a novice teacher focus their attention on student learning by asking open-ended questions about possible accommodations or modifications the novice teacher can use during the lesson so students can access lesson content more effectively.

Educative mentoring is highly adaptable in that the educative mentor determines needs of the novice teacher and adjusts mentoring actions based on those needs (Schwille, 2008). Educative mentors should understand kinds of supports novice teachers need and then provide support that is relevant utilizing “bifocal vision” (p. 162). Bifocal vision requires the educative mentor to respond to immediate needs of the novice teacher while also being able to identify long-term goals for the novice teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille). Schwille describes educative mentors as deliberately shaping learning opportunities for novice teachers to grow in their teaching skills. Novices take on the role of learner in the mentor-mentee relationship. Educative mentoring is about the mentor fostering a sense of inquiry, promoting reflection, and supporting growth of the novice teacher (Feiman-Nemser; Schwille). This study focused on knowledge and skills mentors used to address needs of novice SETs in an educative mentoring relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework for this study included concepts drawn from community of practice, sociocultural theory, and the theory of reflective practice. Community of practice refers
to learning as a social system particularly within the mentoring relationship. Sociocultural theory entails focusing on Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and its relationship to human cognitive development. Finally, reflective practice provides a basis for how the educative mentor and novice SET enact their roles. An overview of each follows with more detailed descriptions in Chapter 2.

**Community of Practice**

Initially described by Lave and Wenger (1991), community of practice can be defined as a social phenomenon in which a group of people who share a particular expertise engage in a common pursuit of shared learning through utilization of explicit and tacit knowledge (Wang et al., 2011; Wenger, 1998). Members of a community of practice bring their own knowledge and experiences to the community. Through interaction and discourse, community members share their ideas, experiences, and knowledge, thereby creating new knowledge for members of the community of practice (Lave, 1991).

**Vygotsky**

Sociocultural theory, described by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that human cognitive development is dependent on social, cultural-historical, and individual interactions. Existing experiences and knowledge a person possesses are influenced by social interactions they have with others. During these interactions, a reorganization of the person’s knowledge structure takes place, thereby creating new understanding (Vygotsky). As the individual continues to interact socially, concept meanings that have been linked to experiences continue to change increasing individual’s learning.
Vygotsky (1978) describes an individual’s potential for cognitive development lies within an area known as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD can be defined as distance between a level of knowledge and problem-solving an individual possesses and the potential problem-solving ability an individual may have when provided with support by another person (Vygotsky). As learners develop new knowledge and continue to receive support from more knowledgeable people, learners will reach new outer limits of their ZPDs.

Reflective Practice

Teachers who subscribe to and employ reflective practice examine and frame their problems of practice to determine solutions (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). They utilize knowledge that is embedded in practice, gained through daily interactions in the classroom, and accumulated over time to solve problems of practice. Additionally, reflective teachers must be willing to examine their own assumptions and beliefs and be committed to equality and respecting differences within the classroom to provide opportunities for all students alike.

Problem Statement

Feiman-Nemser (2001) shared a lack of understanding exists regarding mentors’ knowledge and skills and how mentors make it accessible to novices. Schwille (2008) also suggested that it is necessary to understand skills that mentors need to provide authentic learning opportunities for novice teachers. Both Feiman-Nemser and Schwille were referring to knowledge and skills of educative mentors in providing educative mentoring to novice teachers. Presently, much of research that exists on novice teacher mentoring focuses on conventional mentoring where a mentor provides professional and emotional support to the novice teacher
(Algozzine et al., 2007; Israel et al., 2014; Quinn & D’Amato Andrews, 2004). In contrast, there is a dearth of research on knowledge and skills needed by the mentor to provide educative mentoring to novice teachers.

Just as roles and responsibilities between SETs and GETs are different, so too are their mentoring needs. Washburn-Moses (2010) found in her comparison of policy and practice of SETs and GETs that a difference does exist in their mentoring needs. Similarly, Billingsley et al. (2009) recommended that induction supports for novice SETs should be tailored to meet their unique needs. Novice SETs can benefit from specialized mentoring to better meet their unique instructional and emotional needs, and educative mentoring can provide that individualized support. However, no current research exists that examines educative mentoring as an induction support for SETs.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine knowledge and skills mentors used to address needs of novice SETs in an educative mentoring relationship. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do mentors perceive as the knowledge and skills needed to provide educative mentoring to novice SETs?
2. In what ways does a mentor utilize knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs?
Significance of the Study

Needs of novice SETs are unique in comparison to GETs (Washburn-Moses, 2010) given that role and responsibilities of novice SETs are more complex. Therefore, novice SETs should be provided with support to meet their unique needs (Billingsley et al., 2009). In educative mentoring, mentors adapt their mentoring practices to address novices’ own learning needs (Schwille, 2008). However, research does not exist that examines educative mentoring in relation to novice SETs. This study provided an entrance into research on educative mentoring for novice SETs.

Additionally, this study examined the particular knowledge and skills educative mentors used to address needs of their novice SETs. For mentors to better prepare themselves and to be more successful when supporting novice SETs, it is essential for them to understand required knowledge and skills. Once mentors understand what is needed, it can be a starting point for improvement of their mentoring practices. Mentors whose mentoring practices are well developed can be more effective in their support and more readily meet specific novice SETs’ needs.

Definitions

The following terms are used in this research:

**Educative Mentoring** – Educative mentors use their knowledge and skills to support novice teachers by assessing needs of the novice teachers and creating meaningful learning opportunities within the novice teacher’s own classroom. Educative mentors focus on setting a climate for inquiry and promote reflection for novice teachers. Educative mentors provide more
than just emotional and procedural mentoring support. They also guide novice teachers through experiences to promote their growth as novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille, 2008).

**Emotional Support** – Activities and tasks provided by mentors that support emotional well-being of novice teachers, which includes promoting personal growth, identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

**Professional Support** – Activities and tasks performed by mentors that help novice teachers assimilate into their roles as teachers to help them learn the ropes (Ragins & Kram, 2007)

**Special Education Teacher** – Teachers whose students have diverse needs such as academic difficulties, physical challenges, emotional or behavioral difficulties and require specialized instruction to meet their complex needs. Special education teachers have knowledge of general education curriculum and are able to use appropriate accommodations or adaptations to instruction and curricula to meet students’ needs while also implementing students’ individual education plans (IEPs) (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017).

**Methodology**

This study was designed as a qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were from an Illinois therapeutic school for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and included two mentor teachers. Data were collected through interviews, audio recorded mentor-mentee meetings, and participant journals during the 2019-2020 school year. Theoretical framework used in this study, with concepts drawn from community of practice, sociocultural theory, and theory of reflective practice, served as a foundation for data analysis.
Organization of Study

This study is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, including theoretical framework, problem and purpose statements, research questions, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the study based on relative sociocultural theories. In addition, Chapter 2 presents a review of literature on an historical perspective of induction and mentoring practices, a definition and foundation for educative mentoring, an examination of roles and responsibilities of SETs, and a deeper view of theories that comprise the theoretical framework used in this study. Chapter 3 describes in depth methodology utilized to complete the research. Findings are presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 from data collected through interviews, audio recorded mentor-SET meetings, and participant journals. Separate findings chapters allow the voice of individual mentors to be presented. Finally, Chapter 6 provides analysis of data, a discussion of the findings, and implications for current practice and future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature that frames my study. First, I provide a historical synopsis of induction and mentoring practices. Second, a definition and foundation for educative mentoring are discussed. Third, examination of roles and responsibilities of special education teachers (SETs) is provided as well as a comparison between roles and responsibilities of SETs and general education teachers (GETs). Finally, I include a deeper view of theories that comprised the theoretical framework used in this study.

Historical Synopsis of Induction and Mentoring Practices

**Induction**

Novice teachers’ experiences during their beginning years of teaching are often quite difficult due to novices having to take on both role of teacher and learner (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Billingsley et al. (2004) describe the first-year novice teachers are in the classroom as one of survival in which novice teachers do not truly understand the time teaching requires, may overestimate their abilities, and may hold unrealistic expectations. Novice teachers are expected to engage their students in learning, utilize teaching skills that are not well developed yet, and build relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators (Billingsley et al.; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Wilkinson, 2009; Wood, Jilk, & Paine, 2012). For these reasons, novice teachers need support in their beginning years, which can be provided through induction.
programs (Billingsley et al.; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Feiman-Nemser et al. stated that “what happens to beginning teachers during their early years on the job determines not only whether they stay in teaching but also what kind of teacher they become” (p. 4). By providing novice teachers with the proper type of support, they can become responsive and reflective practitioners who focus on students’ needs and learning.

But formal induction programs have not always been a part of novice teachers’ assimilation into teaching. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) described how novice teachers were often left on their own to sink or swim, which inevitably left them more likely to leave the teaching profession. The sink or swim method of teacher support left newly hired teachers to solve problems on their own, often leaving novice teachers to succeed or fail in isolation (Ingersoll & Smith; Wood et al., 2012; Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). However, as concerns of teacher shortages, high attrition rates among teachers, and consternation with the teaching quality grew (Boe et al., 1998; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2012) an increased need for novice teacher induction programs emerged.

**Beginning of Formal Induction**

In the 1980s formal induction programs were on the rise as part of larger school reforms and in anticipation of a looming teacher shortage (Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Strong, 2009). As there was a significant need to retain teachers, formal induction programs began to be established, which also resulted in states adopting induction and mentoring policies. Prior to 1984, only eight states had policies for novice teacher induction programs (Strong; Wilkins, 2015), but by 1992, induction programs for novice teachers were added in 26 states, of which more than half of programs combined were mandated state-wide (Strong; Wilkins). Pilot
programs and competitive grants were implemented in 16 remaining states (Strong; Wilkins), meaning there was support at state levels for novice teacher induction programs.

As state induction and mentoring policies became more prevalent three particular programs: 1) Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST), 2) Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), and 3) Peer Assistance and Evaluation Program (PAEP) were well-regarded and highlighted key policy features (Bullough, 2012; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Strong, 2009). Table 2.1 outlines three programs and key features of each program.

**BEST program.** First, developed in Connecticut in 1986, the BEST program was designed to improve effectiveness of novice teachers’ instruction, thereby improving student learning (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Strong, 2009). The BEST program is a two-year standards-based induction program that combines support of a mentor during the novice teacher’s first year and a performance-based assessment in the form of a portfolio completed during the novice teacher’s second year (Britton, Raizen, Paine, & Huntley, 2000; Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Feiman-Nemser & Carver; Strong). Mentors, in the BEST program, help new teachers strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge, improve instructional strategies, increase knowledge of students, and understand teaching and learning standards while in a supportive and non-evaluative role with the novice teacher (Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Feiman-Nemser & Carver; Strong).
Table 2.1
Comparison of Induction Programs and Key Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction Program</th>
<th>BEST</th>
<th>BTSA</th>
<th>PAEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year established</strong></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># of years</strong></td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Up to 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor assignment</strong></td>
<td>1(^{st}) year only</td>
<td>1(^{st})&amp; 2(^{nd}) years</td>
<td>Up to 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Mentor time**   | Mentor = full time teacher  
Mentor-novice meetings occur before or after school | Mentor = full release mentor  
Weekly mentor-novice meetings | Mentor = full release mentor  
Bi-weekly mentor-novice meetings |
| **Mentor assessment of novice teacher** | Performance-based formative assessment | Standards-based formative assessment | Standards-based summative evaluation |
| **Mentor selection** | Application & recommendation of administration | Actively recruited & selected based on principal recommendation | Interested teachers selected by a panel of union-appointed teachers & board-appointed administrators |
| **Mentor training** | 3-day state-sponsored training (on-going mentor development not mandated) | 2-day state-sponsored training (on-going mentor development not mandated) | • No formal mentor training  
• Training provided on district evaluation forms |
| **Mentor training content** | • Reflective questioning  
• Active listening  
• Giving objective feedback  
• Common Core of Teaching (vision for effective teaching) | • Relationship building  
• Needs of beginning teachers  
• CA teaching standards  
• Role of standards in assessing novice teacher practice  
• Reflective conversations | • Procedural guidance on observation-based documents  
• Prepared mentors for role as evaluators |

Table continued on next page
### Table cont. from previous page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor observations</th>
<th>Inconsistent</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Six times per year (Highly structured &amp; focused)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mentor tool use     | • Standards used inconsistently | • Use of content & teaching standards to guide work  
                      |                      | • Formative assessment strategies of novice  
                      |                      | • Mentor-novice collaboration log  
                      |                      | • Use of Developmental Continuum of Teaching Abilities rubric | • Use of content and teaching standards to guide work  
                      |                      |                      | • Detailed observation protocols |

Note: Based on Feiman-Nemser and Carver (2012)

**BTSA program.** Next, the BTSA program was created and implemented in California in 1992 to complement the teacher credentialing system. Similar to BEST, the BTSA program focused on policies that improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Strong, 2009). Induction support in the BTSA program included two years of mentor assistance for novice teachers with an emphasis on formative assessment aligned to California teaching standards (Britton et al., 2000; Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Feiman-Nemser & Carver; Strong). Full time release mentors had caseloads of 12 to 14 novice teachers grouped geographically for easier access for mentors. Successful participation in the BTSA program is a requirement for novice teachers to finalize their teaching credentials (Carver & Feiman-Nemser). A key feature of the BTSA program consisted of weekly staff meetings for mentors to be able to discuss their mentoring practices (Feiman-Nemser & Carver).
PAEP program. The final induction program differs in the evaluative role mentors play compared to mentors’ role in the BEST and BTSA programs. In 1985, PAEP was developed in Cincinnati, Ohio, as a response to a call by the American Federation of Teachers for greater professionalism and involvement by teachers in policy decisions (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). In the PAEP, a consulting teacher is assigned to assist and evaluate a novice teacher for up to two years based on district standards for student learning (Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Feiman-Nemser & Carver; 2012). PAEP differs from BEST and BTSA programs in that mentors are required to evaluate novice teachers in a summative manner, which determined if the novice teacher would remain in the teaching role.

As Table 2.1 summarizes, induction programs can vary in types of support they provide to novice teachers. However, research indicates that certain features are necessary for induction programs to be effective (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2012). These features include professional development designed for novice teacher growth (Billingsley et al., 2004; Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Griffin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009), common planning time between mentor and novice teacher (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), formal and informal observations done by mentors (Algozzine et al., 2007; Billingsley et al.; Griffin; Israel et al., 2014), and formative assessment of novice teachers designed to provide feedback for growth (Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Feiman-Nemser & Carver). But the most frequently utilized induction support was the assignment of a mentor to a novice teacher (Billingsley et al.; Carver & Feiman-Nemser; Corcoran-Nielsen et al.; Feiman-Nemser & Carver; Griffin; Wilkinson), which was found in BEST, BTSA, and PAEP programs.
Common Induction Components

While induction programs should contain certain features to be considered effective (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2012), it can be argued that just the presence of one of these features does not necessarily deem the induction program comprehensive. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) in their large-scale study found that as the number of induction components novice teachers received increased, there was a strong likelihood those novice teachers were less likely to leave the teaching profession. Of the induction components, Ingersoll and Smith found some of the strongest factors for reduced turnover were the assignment of a mentor in the same field, common planning time with other teachers, regular collaboration time with other teachers, and access to an outside network of other teachers. Similarly, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) suggested induction elements producing the strongest effects were having a mentor in the same field, common planning time with other teachers in the same subject area, and regular collaboration with other teachers.

In Illinois support for novice teacher induction has included the development of comprehensive and rigorous standards to guide induction policy and programs. The Illinois Induction Program Standards were adopted in 2010 with the goal of helping new teachers gain instructional excellence through the development of their skills and teaching strategies (Illinois Induction Program Continuum, 2010). These standards include elements, such as an assignment of a mentor, professional development for the novice teacher, and formative assessment of the novice teacher to provide feedback, all of which have been indicated in research as key features for effective induction programs. Additionally, the Illinois Induction Program Standards focus on
support for mentors, which is necessary for effective and high-quality mentors (New Teacher Center, 2018).

As we have seen, many important elements for comprehensive teacher induction programs exist. The most common and significant element of novice teacher induction programs throughout much of research is the assignment of a mentor from the same field or subject area as the novice teacher (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Griffin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009). Schwille (2008) defined a mentor’s role as helping novice teachers to learn the practice of teaching. Schwille goes on to state that through relationships between novice teachers and mentors, novices will develop skills to continue to learn and strengthen their teaching practice.

Mentoring

Foundation of Mentor’s Role

Outside of the education arena, mentoring began as a way to help new employees or protégés in their career (Allen et al., 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kram, 1983). A mentoring relationship is generally two-sided, consisting of a protégé or new employee and a mentor or more experienced employee who provides organizational information and advice through formal or informal meetings (Allen et al; Mijares et al., 2013). Ragins and Kram (2007) described mentoring relationships as contextual and developmental in that growth and learning occur for the protégé and mentor within the work environment. Support provided by mentors can take on two functions; career-related support and psychosocial support (Allen et al; Kram; Ragins & Kram). Career-related support consists of activities such as increasing a protégé’s visibility
within the organization, offering career advice, and/or supporting a protégé’s advancement within the company. Psychosocial support includes building a trusting relationship, offering acceptance and counseling, and being a role-model (Allen et al; Kram; Ragins & Kram). Mijares et al.’s meta-analysis of mentoring across six different disciplines (nursing, anthropology, business, education, psychology, and social work) found that in addition to support the mentors provide to protégés, outcomes of mentoring include protégés’ personal and professional growth and improved self-confidence.

Mentoring relationships Ragins and Kram (2007) described actually started to become part of the formal mentoring landscape in the 1980s when Michael Zey introduced the Mutual Benefits Model (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Strong, 2009). Rooted in social exchange theory, this model is based on the premise individuals will enter and remain in a relationship as long as certain needs are being met (Ingersoll & Strong; Strong). In addition, the organization in which the mentoring relationship is based must also benefit from the relationship (Allen et al, 2009; Zey, 1984), such as an increase in sales when a novice salesperson is mentored by a veteran salesperson. Similarly, Allen et al. described mentoring as a mutual benefit; however, they acknowledged it is an asymmetrical relationship in which more benefit may be realized by protégés compared to mentors. However, mentoring relationships are dynamic and change over time (Allen et al; Kram, 1983).

Mentoring has not always been a model used to support novice teachers’ assimilation into the field. Initially, support for novice teachers was almost non-existent with a sink or swim method of induction for novice teachers being employed. Originally, mentors were more experienced teachers assigned as a buddy to a novice teacher (Wilkins, 2015) to answer questions and to welcome the novice teacher into the school (Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007). The
role tended to be informal and unstructured with no specific roles and responsibilities assumed by mentors (Wilkins). However, as teacher shortages increased and induction policies were adopted across the nation, mentors’ roles changed.

**Transformation of Mentor’s Role**

As formal induction programs became more prevalent in education, mentors’ role developed into a foundation of induction programs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Helping novice teachers advance their instructional practices, aiding in improving student learning, and helping novice teachers establish themselves as professionals became a focus of the mentor’s role (Bullough, 2012; Carver & Feiman-Nemser; New Teacher Center, 2018). As Feiman-Nemser et al. (1999) described first years of teaching are times of intense learning and significant anxiety for novice teachers. Novice teachers need guidance and support from a mentor to move from being a pre-service teacher to a successful in-service teacher (Feiman-Nemser et al.; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Studies have shown that mentoring has a positive effect on novice teachers, and they may be less likely to leave teaching when provided with the support of a mentor (Corcoran-Nielsen et al.; Ingersoll & Smith; Ingersoll & Strong, 2012). In addition to improved teacher retention, Bay and Parker-Katz (2009) found mentor assistance reduced stress and anxiety for novice teachers as well as helped novice teachers understand school policies and procedures.

Mentors’ support of novice teachers became dually functioned in which mentors provided career-related and emotional support (Achinstein & Davis, 2014; Israel et al., 2014). In career-related or professional support, a mentor’s focus was that of local guide for the novice teacher (Achinstein & Davis; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) where the mentor offered support on
issues such as managing student behavior, understanding school policies and procedures, or finding resources within the school. Additionally, mentors provided emotional support, through actions such as helping novice teachers deal with job-related anxiety and providing understanding about being a new teacher (Bullough, 2012; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Israel et al.; Young et al., 2005). Mentors’ emotional support allowed novice teachers to feel part of the school community and offered encouragement during stressful times.

Ragins and Kram (2007) suggested that professional and emotional support were separate dimensions in mentoring relationships that had different groundings and outcomes. In contrast, Ansari-Ricci and Zetlin (2013) stated that the foundation of the mentoring relationship is built on emotional and professional support being woven together. While these positions differ in their structure of support, they both clearly identify professional and emotional support are dimensions necessary to mentoring relationships. Interestingly, perceptions of the beginning teachers and mentors may actually determine what function the support is playing in mentoring relationships. Research has indicated support mentors considered to be professional support was viewed by novice teachers as being emotional support (Israel et al., 2014; Ansari-Ricci & Zetlin).

Because emotional support does play a significant role in mentoring relationships (Kilburg, 2007), it is necessary that mentors be able to provide this type of support in an effective manner. Foor and Cano (2012) suggest that mentors themselves must understand the importance of emotional support in mentoring relationships. When selecting mentors to provide support to beginning teachers, criteria that should be considered are mentors’ abilities to be good listeners and communicate effectively (Ansari- Ricci & Zetlin, 2013).
Schwille (2008) stated that “all good teachers do not make good mentors” (p.163). Moir and Gless (2001) affirmed this stance and further indicated that mentors must be carefully selected, trained and provided with ongoing support. Key elements described by Moir and Gless are considered foundational when describing induction programs. These elements can be found in the New Teacher Center’s (2018) Teacher Induction Program Standards as well as the Illinois Induction Program Standards developed by the Illinois Induction Program Continuum (2010). Mentor selection process should include candidates who are well versed in reflective practices, have strong interpersonal skills and promote collaboration (Crutcher & Naseem, 2016; Illinois Induction Program Continuum; Jones & Straker, 2006; New Teacher Center), and possess extensive content and instructional practice knowledge (Achinstein & Davis, 2014; Illinois Induction Program Continuum).

Another important aspect of mentoring is professional training and ongoing support mentors receive while they are supporting novice teachers (Davey & Ham, 2010; Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005). Crutcher and Naseem’s (2016) meta-analysis of effective mentoring practices found that professional development highly influenced mentors’ practices. They argued that if mentors did not possess necessary skills, they would not be able to support the needs of novice teachers.

Special Education Teacher Mentoring

While mentoring can be considered one of the most effective supports provided to novice teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Griffin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009), much of what is known about it is comes from literature relating to general education teachers (GETs; Bay & Parker-
Katz, 2009; Rosenberg, Griffin, Kilgore, & Carpenter, 1997). Billingsley et al.’s (2009) review of literature on induction practices for special education teachers (SETs) found that little is known about induction and mentoring for novice SETs. However, the majority of studies Billingsley et al. (2009) examined showed a mentor’s support was the main induction activity provided to novice SETs.

Mentor characteristics were significant in novice SET induction programs. Mentors who were in the same building as novice teachers and had experience teaching students with the same disabilities or same grade level as novice teachers were considered to be the most effective mentors (Billingsley et al., 2004; Griffin, 2010; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). White and Mason found that when novice SETs and mentors are appropriately matched, there was a greater level of support offered. Additionally, properly matched mentors provided more relevant feedback to novice SETs (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012).

Support provided to novice SETs by mentors varied from professional to emotional, both of which were considered necessary by novice SETs (Israel et al., 2014; White & Mason, 2006). Israel et al. described the need for both types of support during times when novice SETs perceived themselves as in critical need of support. Mentors were able to provide professional support to meet specific needs of novice SETs while also embedding emotional support. Similarly, Griffin (2010) found novice SETs perceived mentoring to be more effective when professional support for teaching was paired with emotional support by mentors.

A significant aspect of novice SET mentoring that emerged from literature was novice SETs required mentoring support that meets their specific and individual needs (Billingsley et al., 2004; Rosenberg et al., 1997; Washburn-Moses, 2010). Bay and Parker-Katz (2009) emphasized this perspective in their meta-analysis on induction for beginning special educators.
in which they stated novices SETs’ curricular and instructional issues varied widely because abilities of students in their classrooms also varied widely. While studies suggest novice SETs need individualized mentoring support, additional research needs to be conducted since little research currently exists.

Educative Mentoring

Educative mentoring is an induction support that meets individual and specific needs of novice teachers (Schwille, 2008; Upson Bradbury, 2010). It goes beyond professional and emotional support mentors typically provide to novices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McDonald & Flint, 2011). Educative mentoring is defined as support given to novice teachers by mentors that promotes inquiry and reflection on novice teachers’ practice through experiences in novice teachers’ own classroom (Feiman-Nemser). Constructivist in nature, educative mentoring provides growth-producing experiences by mentors so novice teachers can improve their teaching skills and understanding of pedagogy (Feiman-Nemser; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Schwille).

Bifocal Vision

Educative mentors should understand specific kinds of support novice teachers need and then provide individualized support relevant to meet those needs utilizing “bifocal vision” (Schwille, 2008, p. 162). Bifocal vision requires educative mentors to respond to immediate needs of novice teachers while also being able to identify long-term goals for novices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille; Van Ginkel, Oolbekkink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2016). For instance, educative mentors can help novice teachers identify an accommodation a particular student needs
to access curriculum while also working with a novice teacher to improve her ability to write measurable IEP goals. Understanding novice teachers’ short and long term needs also requires mentors to consider development levels of novice teachers they support (Upson Bradbury, 2010). For novice teachers to engage in the process of learning and grow in their teaching practice, mentors must operate in novice teachers’ zone of proximal development (Upson Bradbury).

Attributes of Educative Mentors

Griffin (2010) found in her meta-analysis on induction of novice SETs, successful mentors asked questions and provided suggestions instead of directly offering solutions to problems. Similarly, in Feiman-Nemser’s (2001) case study of practices utilized by an educative mentor, the role of the educative mentor is described as that of a co-thinker with the novice teacher. As co-thinkers, educative mentors provided support to novice teachers through inquiry and reflection using an individualized approach (Feiman-Nemser).

Educative mentors need to be adaptable to identify and meet novice teachers’ needs. They must be able to help novice teachers become responsive and reflective practitioners to solve problems of practice. McDonald and Flint (2011) argue it is not enough for educative mentors to be good teachers, but alternatively they should possess extensive knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, be effective and reflective practitioners, and be able to cogently communicate with novice teachers in a supportive manner, all characteristics of an effective mentor.
Educative Mentors vs. Instructional Coaches

While an educative mentor and an instructional coach may seem quite similar and do share some common characteristics, such as a broad knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy and being a reflective practitioner (Knight, 2011), their roles do differ in the execution of support provided to teachers. Knight stated that instructional coaches provide professional development for teachers through a collaborative partnership approach in which the teacher and instructional coach have equal voices in the learning process. In contrast, Schwille (2008) described educative mentors as deliberately shaping learning opportunities for novice teachers to grow in teaching skills in which novice teachers take on the role of learners. Similarly, Van Ginkel et al. (2016) found adaptive mentors encouraged novice teachers to think through problems of practice and promoted the process of reflection by novice teachers. By utilizing a variety of mentoring strategies, individual needs of a novice teacher can be more easily met. Billingsley et al. (2004) found that early career support should be individualized for novice SETs because all teachers are different, as are contexts in which they teach. Similarly, Schwille stated that when mentors are thoughtful in their approach to structuring and adapting learning opportunities for novice teachers, novices will move farther along in their learning.

While some research describes the importance of educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Langdon & Ward, 2014; Schwille, 2008) and the role of the educative mentor (Gardiner & Weisling, 2015; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Van Ginkel et al, 2016), no research specific for utilizing educative mentoring with novice SETs exists. However, Billingsley et al.’s (2009) meta-analyses on induction practices of SETs recommends that induction support for SETs should be tailored due to unique needs of novice SETs.
Roles and Responsibilities of SETs

SETs have different roles and responsibilities from GETs that warrant them potentially needing different induction and mentoring support. A qualitative study conducted by Youngs et al. (2011) compared roles of both types of teachers and found the following common responsibilities: 1) curricular knowledge, 2) planning and providing instruction, 3) managing student behavior, 4) motivating students, 5) working with parents, and 6) interacting with colleagues and administration. Similarly, Rosenberg et al. (1997) examined roles of SETs and GETs and determined that managing student behaviors and planning lessons and instruction were responsibilities that were part of both teachers’ job.

However, the responsibilities for SETs extend far beyond these. While SETs must have the same curricular knowledge that GETs do, special education students’ skill levels can range dramatically, warranting that SETs be able to adapt curriculum and instruction and make accommodations for students to be able to access curriculum (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2004; Billingsley et al., 2009; Urbach et al., 2015; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011). Frequently, SETs must create their own materials and resources or make adaptations to curriculum because district-provided curriculum often does not meet students’ needs (Youngs et al.). Additionally, some students may have significant academic deficits that require SETs to provide individualized instruction for those students (Urbach et al.).

Paperwork is an added responsibility that SETs must undertake that is not part of GETs’ roles (Billingsley et al., 2004, Urbach et al, 2015; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011). Given that all students who receive special education services require an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), SETs must complete an IEP for each of their students every year. A well-
developed IEP requires SETs to identify long- and short-term learning goals for students that are standards based and meet students’ specific needs (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017). Completing the IEP also requires that SETs understand and comply with federal and state regulations related to special education law (Rosenberg et al., 1997; Youngs et al.), a responsibility not part of GETs’ roles. Lastly, SETs must collaborate with numerous stakeholders, including members of students’ IEP teams, administrators, and parents (Urbach et al.; Washburn-Moses Youngs et al.) to ensure students’ needs are being met, information is being shared effectively, and compliance is occurring with the IEP. With all these stakeholders, effective communication must be in place for development of sound relationships to occur.

SETs have a complex role and are required to have additional knowledge and skills compared to GETs. Often SETs spend a significant amount of time and effort on portions of their job that differ from GETs’ responsibilities (Youngs et al., 2011). Given that roles and responsibilities of SETs include expectations not included in GETs’ roles and responsibilities, it is necessary to consider that induction supports required by SETs may differ. Billingsley et al. (2009) suggest tailoring induction supports for SETs to meet unique needs of SETs. In so doing, components of SETs’ roles that differ from GETs’ roles can be addressed. Educative mentoring is highly adaptable in that educative mentors determines needs of novice SETs and adjust mentoring actions based on those needs (Schwille, 2008). As an induction support, educative mentoring can provide SETs with individualized assistance they require.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study includes Communities of Practice, Zone of Proximal Development, and Reflective Practice, as described below.

Community of Practice

As sociocultural theory tells us, learning is a social phenomenon, and it is through interactions with others influenced by social, cultural-historical, and individual factors that learning can occur. As a particular concept within the larger domain of sociocultural theory, community of practice examines learning as a social system. First described by Lave and Wenger (1991), community of practice can be defined as a social phenomenon in which a group of people who share particular expertise engage in a common pursuit of shared learning through utilization of explicit and tacit knowledge (see also Wang et al., 2011; Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice are a conceptual place in which individuals can develop, reconcile, and share their own theories and understandings with others who are like minded (Wenger).

Each community of practice enacts procedures and processes differently based on historical and cultural contexts in which the community of practice is situated. The practice of the community reflects how members have engaged with prior situations (Wenger, 2010) as well as social and cultural relevance of the community. Agreement between members in a community of practice is not necessarily required, as this can create an opportunity to increase learning potential among members (Wenger). However, there should be a mutual recognition of trust within the community. Trust in the context of a community of practice can be defined as
members bringing their knowledge and experiences and sharing them freely with others while also accepting that others have knowledge and experiences to share (Street, 2004; Wenger).

Through interaction and discourse, community members exchange ideas, experiences, and knowledge, thereby creating new knowledge for members of the community of practice (Lave, 1991). An example of this is a professional learning community (PLC) in an elementary school. Teachers bring their individual experiences, ideas, and problems of practice to the group to work toward the group’s goal of improving student engagement and achievement.

**Participation in a Community**

Lave (1991) argues that becoming knowledgeable and developing an identity as a member within a community of practice are intertwined. As individuals increase their participation in a community of practice, their learning is molded and meaning is added, which in turn increases participation in the community. As new members, or newcomers, increase their participation in the community and gain knowledge, they become full participants or old-timers. This cycle of community reproduction relies on newcomers comprehending goals of the community, understanding the community as a whole, and participating in community activities through support and guidance from old-timers (Lave).

John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) suggest that being part of a community of practice allows newcomers to gain access to tools, which are part of the sociocultural environment in which the community is situated. Access to these tools allows newcomers to grow in their knowledge and learning and to participate more fully in the community. Tools give newcomers an understanding of tacit knowledge often taken for granted by community members.
When considering how a community of practice relates to novice SETs, Street (2004) suggested that a novice teacher must simultaneously carry out tasks required of teaching while also continuing to learn how to teach. Feiman-Nemser (2001) provided this same thought in her case study on educative mentoring for novice teachers. She stated that novice teachers have two jobs: teaching and learning how to teach. Feiman-Nemser (2001) goes a step further in stating that preparation alone is not adequate for novices, but rather learning how to teach should be embedded in the job.

As Street (2004) and Feiman-Nemser (2001) both described, novice teachers have two roles: one being a teacher and arguably more important a learner. Given that novice SETs have dual roles, membership in a community of practice can be beneficial. The novice teacher can bring her experiences and understanding to other members in the community of practice and through support and guidance the novice can transform her understanding into new ones.

It is not the mere fact that novice teachers are part of the school community that makes them members within a community of practice. Instead as Wenger (1998) identified, it is their engagement in the community’s practice that makes them members. As they begin to understand goals of the community, they will become more engaged and increase their participation and position within the community.

Educative Mentoring as a Community of Practice

Educative mentoring draws from concepts of community of practice. To be clear, educative mentoring is not about novice teachers learning to teach the same way their mentors do, but instead helping novice teachers learn to express themselves as educators and to help novice teachers become responsive reflective practitioners (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Langdon &
Ward, 2104; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Schwille, 2008). When this definition is examined against the concept of community of practice, it can be noted that the mentor-novice teacher relationship forms a community of practice. Novice teachers bring their knowledge and experiences to mentoring relationships and educative mentors guide novice teachers’ learning through use of cultural and historical tools and new experiences (Upson Bradbury, 2010). Parker-Katz and Bay (2008) explained that teachers learn through active participation in the community and that sense making occurs through collaborative interactions.

Trust, a component found in both educative mentoring and community of practice, is vitally important to mentor-novice teacher relationships. Bullough (2012) suggests that a challenge exists for mentors to be supportive, yet constructively critical without dampening confidence of a novice teacher or harming the mentor-novice teacher relationship. For there to be growth-producing experiences for novice teachers, there must be an open and trusting relationship between educative mentors and novice teachers (Schwille, 2008). Street (2004) explained that within the community of practice, or mentoring relationship, mentors need to provide novices with a safe environment to wonder and take risks. Alternately, mentors must be ready to challenge novice teachers in order to promote the novices’ growth (Street).

Central to a community of practice that forms educative mentoring relationships are educative mentors and novice SETs. Support that promotes inquiry and reflection by a novice teacher on her practice through experiences within a novice teacher’s own classroom is provided by an educative mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Additionally, a novice teacher brings her knowledge and experiences to a mentoring relationship, or community of practice. Educative mentor guide novice teachers’ learning through experiences and interactions (Parker-Katz &
Bay, 2008), thereby creating new knowledge for novices. Similarly, educative mentors also gain new knowledge from novice teachers through shared experiences.

**Characteristics of a Community of Practice**

**Domain.** Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015) explain for a community to be considered one of practice, the community must have three crucial characteristics: domain, community, and practice. Complementary development of these three characteristics is what establishes the community of practice, and each characteristic plays a distinct role in its formation. In the first characteristic, domain, novice SETs and educative mentors have a shared interest and common purpose for increasing novice SETs’ knowledge and skills as teachers (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner). Mentoring relationships are contextually situated around experiences that occur within novice SETs’ classrooms. These experiences and any potential problems of practice provide growth opportunities for educative mentors to guide novice SETs’ learning.

**Community.** In the second characteristic, community, novice SETs and educative mentors build their relationship through mutual trust, a willingness to share their knowledge and experiences, and regular interactions with each other (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). It is through this increased sense of community educative mentors are able to more clearly identify novice SETs’ needs and willingly share knowledge with novice SETs in a manner conducive to their learning. Similarly, novice SETs can develop trust and a level of comfort with educative mentors, thereby increasing participation in mentoring relationships.

**Practice.** Lastly, in the characteristic of practice, novice SETs and educative mentors share their knowledge, experiences, and learning. As a full participants in the community of practice, educative mentors can share knowledge, resources, and experiences with novice SETs
to help address problems of practice that occur within novices’ classrooms. Educative mentor guide novice SETs in addressing problems, so novice SETs can develop viable solutions. Similarly, novice SETs have different knowledge, experiences, and learning that is shared with educative mentors. Through discourse and an exchange of knowledge, experiences, and learning, novice SETs and educative mentors develop a shared practice.

The combination of the characteristics of domain, community, and practice constitute a community of practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Regular interactions with mentors provides opportunities for novice SETs to grow in knowledge and skills thus encouraging novice SETs to become a full participant in the community of practice.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

Vygotsky (1978) described the process of learning and cognitive development as being reliant on social interactions in that existing experiences and knowledge are influenced by social interactions an individual has with others. During these interactions, reorganization of a person’s knowledge structure takes place, thereby creating new understanding (Vygotsky). These social interactions help individuals learn and cultivate new levels of potential learning. Vygotsky defines differences between a person’s actual and potential levels of learning development as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Within the ZPD, a more knowledgeable person interacts with an individual, or learner, and provides guidance and support for the learner to reach outer limits of the ZPD. Vygotsky stated there is a consistent state of knowledge formation within the ZPD as the person providing guidance can ascertain what an individual has already learned and has yet to be learned.
Levels of Learning

Vygotsky (1978) argued that two distinct developmental levels exist within the ZPD: actual developmental level and potential level. It is within the actual developmental level a learner will have gained knowledge or mastered learning (Vygotsky). Conversely, within the potential developmental level, a learner has not gained specific knowledge or mastered learning, but with guidance of another individual a learner can (Vygotsky). It is within these two levels of the ZPD that educative mentors operate and enact their roles as mentors (Upson Bradbury, 2010).

Educative Mentor Support in the ZPD

The zone of proximal development continuum encompasses learners’ independent learning level and learners’ potential learning level when provided assistance from a more experienced and knowledgeable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). In the independent learner level, novice SETs, when posed with problems of practice, have knowledge and tools to solve problems by themselves. However, when novice SETs do not have knowledge, skills, or tools to adequately solve problems of practice and require assistance of a more experienced peer, they have entered a level of potential development, known as the ZPD. In the ZPD, an educative mentor is a more experienced peer who provides support and guidance to novice SETs to help solve problems of practice. Novice SETs are continually growing and will have problems or experiences beyond their current understanding. Educative mentors can continue to support novice SETs’ growth by being situated in their ZPD.
As Feiman-Nemser (2001) stated, educative mentors use their knowledge and skills to assess novice teachers’ actual and potential learning levels and then create opportunities for novices to grow in their teaching practice. Similarly, Schwille (2008) suggested that educative mentors construct knowledge for novice teachers through scaffolding learning until it is internalized within novices’ ZPDs. Additionally, Schwille states educative mentoring requires educative mentors to engage novices in authentic learning opportunities that go beyond professional and emotional support to move novices further along in their learning.

Novice SETs come to their roles as both teachers and learners (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Street, 2004), which means they need support and guidance to grow and reach the outer limits of their ZPDs. Given their roles and responsibilities, novice SETs require specialized knowledge, such as developing IEPs, complying with special education laws, and adapting curriculum (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2004; Billingsley et al., 2009; Urbach et al., 2015; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011). With support of an educative mentor, novice SETs can increase their specialized knowledge and reach higher levels within their ZPD. Educative mentors provide support to novice SETs by structuring and intentionally shaping learning opportunities (Gardiner & Weisling, 2015; Schwille, 2008) so novice SETs are able to increase their knowledge of teaching and solve their problems of practice. As Schwille (2008) stated, educative mentors must center their practice around providing learning opportunities that are within novices’ Zones of Proximal Development.
Reflective Practice

Key Features of Reflective Practice

As Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue, merely thinking about or questioning a problem of practice does not constitute reflective teaching. Instead, teachers must examine their own assumptions, question goals and values that guide their teaching, and consider contexts in which they teach (Zeichner & Liston). Key aspects of good reflective teaching include teachers being democratic in their approach; they are dedicated to serving all students equally and assume responsibility for their own reflective practices. Reflective teachers consider not only if objectives of their lessons are being met but also the lesson’s results and its impact on student learning. They challenge themselves by questioning their lesson’s content as well as social or cultural effects of lessons on students. Reflective teachers continually challenge themselves with understanding why they are doing what they are doing. Zeichner and Liston (1996) emphasize five key features a reflective teacher embodies.

Frame Problems of Practice. The first key feature of reflective practice is the teacher’s ability to frame problems of practice. Zeichner and Liston (1996) argued reflective teachers attempt to find solutions through examining and framing of their problems of practice. Reflective teachers use their values, knowledge, theories, and practice to interpret and frame their experiences to develop a reframe or new perspective of the problem of practice (Zeichner & Liston). Additionally, reflective teachers utilize knowledge embedded in their practice, gained through daily interactions in their classroom, and accumulated over time to solve problems of practice.
Reflective practice is contextual and requires communication and dialogue with others within the classroom and school (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Zeichner and Liston argue reflective teachers should examine not only their own practice, but they should also examine the larger context of their teaching to make improvements in both areas. Problems of practice do not occur in isolation or without context and should not be reflected upon in such a manner either (Zeichner & Liston).

**Assumptions and Beliefs.** The second key feature of reflective practice is the teacher being aware of assumptions and beliefs. Zeichner and Liston (1996) suggest reflective teachers must demonstrate an understanding and willingness to examine one’s own assumptions and beliefs to take appropriate action. However, this alone does not make a teacher reflective. One must understand how assumptions and beliefs affect actions and, in turn, affect students. Additionally, reflective teachers must be committed to equality and respecting differences within their classroom and to providing opportunities for all students alike.

**Cultural and School Context.** Examining assumptions and beliefs directly ties to the next feature of reflective teaching, which is cultural and/or school context. In reflective practice teachers use their own experiences, transmit knowledge or understanding gained from others, and influence others’ actions. Reflective teachers understand that school context impacts their teaching; therefore, they must take this into consideration when reframing a problem and forming a solution (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

**Curriculum Development and School Change.** The fourth key feature is curriculum development and school change. On a more global level, reflective teachers consider a larger context within which their teaching takes place and understands how it impacts not only the classroom but also the school (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Through reflection teachers develop
theoretical knowledge about practice that they put into action. Reflective teachers can create change within a school environment by sharing results of their own reflective practices with others. They can then assist others in understanding how these results can have an impact in other classrooms. Based on changes in their own classroom, they can also advocate for changes in the school.

**Responsibility for Own Learning.** Lastly, Zeichner and Liston (1996) describe the key feature of reflective practice as teachers taking responsibility for their own learning and professional development. Through examination of problems of practice, assumptions, beliefs, and school context, a reflective teacher can identify the areas needed for her own professional development. Reflection can be a very personal journey for a teacher, as it is often the teacher who examines aspects within their own practice. Given this, it is realistic that reflective teachers take responsibility for their own growth.

Zeichner and Liston (1996) suggest that for reflective teaching to be effective, it must be guided by a teacher examining goals, values, and assumptions. In addition, they must consider the context in which they teach. Reflective teaching should be democratic in the sense that it considers needs of all students equally. At a minimum, reflective teaching should be self-critical so a teacher is confident in scrutinizing her own decisions and judgments to address students’ growth.

An essential part of educative mentoring is use of reflective practice by both educative mentors and novice teachers. The main purpose of educative mentoring is for mentors to provide growth-producing experiences for novice teachers to improve their teaching skills and understanding of pedagogy (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Schwille, 2008); therefore, it is necessary for both mentor and novice teacher to engage in reflective
practice. Zeichner and Liston (1996) describe reflection at its most basic level as an examination of a problem of practice. However, Feiman-Nemser suggests in her qualitative case study on the practices of an educative mentor that reflection should not merely occur when problems are experienced but also when things are going as planned. This allows the mentor and novice teacher to develop an understanding of good teaching and learning.

Reflective Practice in Educative Mentoring

Schwille (2008) suggests educative mentors promote reflective practices and help form such practices in their novices when providing learning opportunities and solving problems. Shaping of the intellectual habit of reflective practice necessitates that reflection is not done in isolation. Instead, it involves an ongoing process that is consistently present in mentor-mentee relationships. Zeichner and Liston (1996) explain that ongoing dialogue and conversation between practitioners is necessary to fully examine a problem and understand multiple perspectives. Interactions between educative mentors and novice teachers rely on mentors being able to effectively communicate with novices in a supportive manner (McDonald & Flint, 2011).

An important distinction of educative mentoring is that it is not about novice teachers learning to teach the same way mentors does, but rather it is mentors helping novices to learn to express themselves as educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Langdon & Ward, 2014; McDonald & Flint, 2011, Schwille, 2008). This can be related to one of Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) features of reflective practice in which reflective teachers grow to be accountable for their own learning and professional development. Through the mentor’s guidance in development of reflective practice, novice teachers learn to examine their own assumptions and beliefs to grow as teachers.
An additional aspect of reflective teaching is in relation to assumptions and values practitioners bring to problems of practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Zeichner and Liston suggest that reflective teachers must be committed to equality, to respecting differences within their classroom, and to providing opportunities for all students alike. This is particularly important for novice SETs who have students with varying abilities and are required to adapt and modify curriculum and instruction and make accommodations for students to be able to access curriculum on a regular basis (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009, Billingsley et al., 2004; Billingsley et al., 2009; Urbach et al., 2015; Youngs et al., 2011). Educative mentors can guide novice SETs’ thinking and help them reflect on how their instructional practices are meeting students’ many needs.

Interconnection between Theoretical Perspectives

The three theoretical perspectives – community of practice, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and reflective practice – interconnect to form a theoretical framework that becomes the foundation for educative mentoring relationships.

Community of Practice

In mentoring relationships, educative mentors and novice SETs form a community of practice that is situated in a novice SET’s ZPD. It is within this community of practice an educative mentor and novice SET join together in mutual participation to advance the learning of a novice SET (Trevathan & Sandretto, 2017). Educative mentors utilize knowledge and experiences during interactions with novice SETs to guide novice SETs’ thoughts, ideas,
assumptions, and beliefs. As novice SETs become more engaged and increase their participation in the community of practice, or mentoring relationship, their knowledge should proliferate.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

As a novice SET reaches new outer limits of ZPD and moves toward full participation in the community of practice, it is essential that the educative mentor use bifocal vision (Schwille, 2008) to understand needs of a novice SET. This requires an educative mentor to respond to immediate needs of the novice SET while also being able to identify long-term goals for the novice SET (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille). Utilizing bifocal vision is essential for educative mentors when providing support to novice SETs since needs of novice SETs are unique (Billingsley et al., 2009).

**Reflective Practice**

Within the community of practice, or mentoring relationship, an educative mentor utilizes reflective practice to identify and frame problems of practice a novice SET may encounter. The goal is to help the novice SET develop into a responsive and reflective practitioner and develop their own identity as a teacher through support provided from the educative mentor and the use of reflection on experiences within the novice SET’s classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille, 2008). As educative mentors provide critical feedback to novice SETs, the goal is to have the novice SET internalize feedback and transform their thinking. This knowledge transformation allows a novice SET to grow in their teaching practice based on actual experiences and problems of practice from within their own classroom (Schwille).
The interconnection of the theoretical perspectives asserts that the community of practice formed between mentor and novice SET should provide an increase in knowledge and growth in teaching practice for the novice SET. In addition, by using reflective practice, the novice SET should grow in her engagement and participation in the community of practice. Since a novice SET comes to teaching with the roles of both teacher and learner, the community of practice is situated within a novice SET’s ZPD. Through an educative mentor’s use of reflective practice, a mentor supports and guides the novice SET’s learning to support the novice SET in reaching the next level in her Zone of Proximal Development.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a historical perspective on novice teacher induction and mentoring practices. In a review of literature, key features of induction programs were identified, of which the most widely utilized induction support is mentoring. Aspects of novice teacher mentoring were discussed, particularly the role of the mentor. Examination of research on novice SET induction and mentoring practices found the support of a mentor is significant support for novice SETs; however, additional research is needed in this area as little research currently exists. As Billingsley et al. (2009) suggest, novice SETs need individualized mentoring support due to their unique needs. For this reason, educative mentoring was examined in depth, as it is a support that focuses on specific needs of novice teachers. To understand the needs of novice SETs, SETs’ roles and responsibilities were described and compared to novice GETs. Finally, the theoretical framework utilized for this study was detailed, including educative mentoring relationships. The research design and methodology are detailed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine knowledge and skills mentors used to address needs of novice SETs in an educative mentoring relationship. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do mentors perceive as the knowledge and skills needed to provide educative mentoring to novice SETs?
2. In what ways does a mentor utilize knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs?

Chapter 3 describes research methods used in this qualitative case study. First is a description of the research design along with rationale for using this approach. Then a description of study participants follows, including information about gaining consent to participate. Subsequently, data collection methods and data analysis strategies are presented.

Research Design

Determining how educative mentors perceive their knowledge and skills was examined in this study through a qualitative case study research design. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a qualitative approach as being one in which researchers can understand individuals lived experiences and meaning they assign to those experiences. For example, understanding
mentors’ perceptions of their own knowledge and skills in educative mentoring is necessary to develop a strong induction program for novice SETs (McDonald & Flint, 2011).

Educative mentoring is highly contextual because it relies on mentors and novice teachers being active participants in learning experiences (Schwille, 2008). Case study research provides a researcher with a way to perform an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within a real-world context (Yin, 2014). Hence, utilizing a case study approach to explore the phenomenon in this case was suitable since it allowed me to examine in-depth interactions between mentor teachers and novice SETs. In addition, using a case study approach allowed the researcher to answer questions of how or why a phenomenon occurs within a bounded system, particularly when boundaries between a phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin). A case study approach was suitable since research questions in this study focused on mentors’ perceptions of the use of their knowledge and skills and how mentors utilized knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs. Merriam and Tisdell explained case study research can be characterized by the singularity of the unit of analysis; in the instance of this study, mentor teachers were the unit of analysis.

Defining the Case

Defining the case in case study research is necessary as it helps a researcher guide and limit the scope of the study (Yin, 2014). Research questions and propositions established by the researcher should be relevant and help in determining the case’s unit of analysis. In addition, the case being studied should be bounded by the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described bounding a case as fencing it in so the particular unit of analysis being investigated is inside the fence and the larger topic is outside the fence. Establishment of case and boundaries also aids in
defining the scope of data collection. Taking Merriam and Tisdell’s guidance into consideration, examining mentors’ interactions with novice SETs served as the focus of this case study. While multiple novice SETs were observed during this study, it was mentors’ knowledge and skills that were the main focus of data collection and analysis. For this reason, the case study structure is a holistic single-case design. Yin explained that a holistic single-case structure is appropriate when the case itself is holistic in nature, meaning no subunits of analysis can be identified and the researcher examines the case in-depth within contextual bounds.

This specific case was chosen for several reasons. First, the school site, which is detailed in the next section, is a therapeutic day school that employed only special education teachers. Second, the two educative mentors (i.e., participants) in this study have also been teachers at this school site so they have contextual knowledge of the location. Third, the school site has implemented a comprehensive induction and mentor program that included the support of an educative mentor for novice SETs within the past two years. Novice teachers in their first or second year of teaching at the school site received formal mentoring from either of the educative mentors who participated in this study; other teachers received informal mentoring. Lastly, this case was time bound (i.e., data were collected during the 2019-2020 school year) to make the study more manageable.

Study Site

The study was conducted at Voyager School (pseudonym), a therapeutic non-public day school for students with autism spectrum disorders located in the Chicagoland area. Approximately 165 students attended the school in grades kindergarten through transition, or ranging in ages 5-21. The student population at Voyager School represented 62 different school
districts from nine counties within an approximately 50-mile radius of the school. All students were out placed to Voyager School from their home public school districts for various reasons such as a home district not having appropriate programming to meet student’s needs, a student’s family requested a change of placement for the student, or a student having significant behavioral challenges or being highly physically aggressive.

Voyager School employed 21 full-time classroom teachers in three program areas: elementary (K-8); secondary (7-12); and transition (12+). In addition to classroom teachers, Voyager School employed a large multidisciplinary team including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, social workers, music therapists, and board-certified behavior analysts. Teacher turnover was a consistent issue for Voyager School in that for the past two years seven new teachers had been hired each year. To address teacher turnover, steps were to reduce attrition. Those steps included development and implementation of a comprehensive induction and mentoring program for novice teachers, instructional coaching support for all teachers, more planning time, and raising base salary for all teachers.

Voyager School was chosen as a research site for a few reasons. First, while all classroom teachers were special education teachers, the structure of the school was set up more like a general education school in that multiple teachers were teaching the same curriculum to students with similar needs and classrooms were grouped by grade level. Second, structure of the induction and mentoring program contained elements that research indicated (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012) are effective in novice teacher mentoring such as full release mentors, mentors with experience in the same subject area, and common planning times between mentors and novice SETs. Finally, I had worked at Voyager School as a classroom teacher and as an administrator for over 10 years, so choosing Voyager
School was convenient and conducting research there allowed me to engage in research with an historical perspective of the setting.

During the data collection portion of this study I was employed as the Senior Supervisor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment at the school. I supervised the mentor teachers who were study participants. However, during the time of this study Voyager School’s Executive Director adjudicated the performance of both mentor teachers. I was not involved in these activities since doing so may have created a conflict of interest and potential undue pressure on the mentor teachers.

Researcher Positionality

Qualitative research requires researchers to be situated or immersed in the world that is being examined to make meaning of and/or interpret situations or phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, when researchers have personal experience with phenomena they are studying, it is necessary for them to explore their personal biases, viewpoints, or assumptions about the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell). Researchers should then set aside or bracket these biases, viewpoints, or assumptions not for objectivity but to acknowledge a more intimate understanding of the research phenomena exists (Fischer, 2009). In full disclosure for this study in the following section I will outline my personal experience in relation to this study.

Education is a second career for me. I earned a Master’s of Arts in Teaching in 2008 and immediately set out to teach general education at the primary grade level. However, I had a difficult time securing a teaching position and accepted a paraprofessional position in 2009 at Voyager School. I remained at Voyager for the next 11 years in various positions: one year as a paraprofessional, two years as a special education teacher, four years as educational coordinator
in the elementary program, and four years as senior supervisor of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the entire school (K-12+). In November 2020, I resigned my position at the school to work in the field of education at the state level. Moving up through the ranks in the various positions at Voyager gave me a broad perspective of student needs, what is required to provide effective instruction, and the challenges faced in managing operations of a school.

One element I found surprisingly missing as a classroom teacher at Voyager was any type of support or mentoring available for new teachers. The sink or swim method was commonplace and something I experienced as a novice teacher. As I moved into my first administrative role as educational coordinator, I became very interested in developing support for new teachers. I designed and implemented the first teacher mentoring program at Voyager as a way for new teachers to learn the many things they needed to know related to their role as a teacher. Over the four years I was in the educational coordinator role, the mentoring program continued to evolve to include support for veteran and accomplished teachers, too.

When I was promoted to Senior Supervisor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, the mentoring program changed significantly. It became a more comprehensive induction and mentoring program implemented school-wide instead of just in the elementary program. An instructional team included an instructional coordinator who also was a mentor teacher, an instructional coach, and a classroom support specialist whose role focused on curricular and resource support for teachers. A focus of the instructional team was to equip and empower teachers schoolwide with knowledge and skills they needed to be effective practitioners.

As the Senior Supervisor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment part of my job responsibilities were to supervise the instructional team, which included two mentor teachers who were asked to be participants in this study. However, for the duration of this study I did not
hold any evaluative responsibilities over the mentor teachers, and their performance evaluations were conducted by the Executive Director of Voyager School. Since the purpose of this study was to examine knowledge and skills of the mentor teachers having any type of evaluative decision-making over mentor teachers could have created a conflict of interest and possibly put undue pressure on participants.

It was important that I did not enter this research with a preconceived idea of outcomes despite having first-hand knowledge of and experience in the mentoring program. To control bias, I utilized semi-structured interviews, member checks, and analytic memo writing during data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask participants additional questions to clarify responses and probe for examples. Member checks were used to clarify participants’ interview responses and to validate response interpretation. Analytic memos written during data collection provided an opportunity to examine my own thinking and how it may have impacted the study.

Participants

Participants in this study were two mentor teachers who were also instructional coaches. Purposeful sampling was utilized for selection of participants for this study since purposeful sampling provided an information-rich case (Patton, 1990). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that purposeful sampling works under the assumption that the researcher wants to gain insight into the case; therefore, participants are selected who will provide such information.
Mentor Teacher 1

The first mentor teacher for this study, Nancy, was a special education teacher for four years and had taught in both public and non-public school settings. During the 2018-2019 school year, she was a full release instructional coach and mentor teacher at Voyager School. Over the past year, she had provided formal mentoring to five novice SETs as well as informal support to the remaining 16 SETs in the school.

Prior to becoming an instructional coach, she had been a classroom teacher for students in fourth through seventh grades for three years at Voyager; one of those years she was the lead elementary teacher. Her mentoring knowledge and skills were developed through master’s degree coursework, reading professional books on the topic of mentoring, attending workshops on mentoring, and the experiences she had mentoring novice SETs as lead elementary teacher. Finally, she gained professional mentoring knowledge by being mentored by her supervisor who was the instructional coordinator for the school.

Mentor Teacher 2

The second mentor teacher for this study, Isabelle, was a special education teacher with three years of teaching experience, all of which occurred at Voyager. She taught for two years in a transition classroom, and during the 2018-2019 school year, she taught in an elementary classroom with students in fifth through seventh grades. The 2019-2020 school year was the first year she was an instructional coach. Her mentoring knowledge and skills were developed through master’s degree coursework, reading professional books on the topic of mentoring, and the experiences she had providing informal mentoring support to novice SETs at the grade level.
she taught. Since she was new to the instructional coach role, she was provided mentoring by the instructional coordinator who was Mentor Teacher 1 in this study and also her supervisor.

Role of Mentor Teachers

The role of mentor teachers at Voyager School focused on providing instructional and curricular support to 21 classroom teachers in the building. One of their main roles was to meet with novice SETs assigned to them weekly and provide mentoring support on topics such as orientation to the school and role of being a teacher, lesson planning, curriculum implementation, IEP goal development, and effective use of paraprofessionals. In addition to providing mentoring support to novice SETs, mentor teachers also provided instructional coaching for accomplished veteran teachers.

Professional development for teachers was highly valued at Voyager. Since professional development was important, mentor teachers were responsible for developing and implementing weekly professional learning opportunities for all teachers at the school. Mentor teachers developed a structure of professional development that included hour-long presentations on timely topics such as state assessment or supervising paraprofessionals. Also included in the professional development structure was a menu-style option in which teachers were able to choose from two presentations they felt were most relevant for them. Lastly, the professional development structure included bi-weekly professional learning communities arranged according to student skill level.

The role of the mentor teachers required them to be familiar with students and their needs in all classrooms. Additionally, mentor teachers built strong relationships with all teachers, had a solid understanding of curricular resources teachers were using, and were able to communicate
effectively with a variety of people. To prepare them to provide mentoring support to novices, mentors participated in an induction program as well. Weekly meetings were held with their supervisors during which they discussed their problems of mentoring practice. The instructional support team met weekly to discuss issues, concerns, and topics relating to all teachers at the school, such as curriculum implementation and/or state assessment. Professional development opportunities were provided throughout the year for mentors to continually improve their mentoring practice. Learning opportunities included activities such as a book study on instructional coaching practices and a mini workshop on effective listening strategies.

Consent to Participate

Mentor teachers were introduced to the study before the start of the 2019-2020 school year during which they were given a written definition of the term “educative mentor” (see Appendix A) as derived from current research on this topic (Feiman-Nemser; 2001, Langdon & Ward; 2014; Schwille, 2008). To ensure mentor teachers understood the term educative mentor, we engaged in discussion, including detailing what was expected of them by participating in this study. I shared with both mentor teachers that during the time of the study I would not be evaluating their performance and that performance evaluations would be managed by the Executive Director. After that discussion and all questions they had were answered, they received written consent forms to confirm their willingness to participate (see Appendix B).

Novice SETs were introduced to the study during the third week of the 2019-2020 school year. I scheduled meetings and met with each novice SET individually during the first four weeks of the 2019-2020 school year. During these meetings I explained the purpose of the study and any potential risks. Written consent forms were provided to novice SETs during the meeting
(see Appendix C). I explained to novice SETs their consent to participate in the study allowed me to collect data involving their interactions with mentor teachers. I further explained the data collected were being analyzed to examine mentors’ knowledge and skills rather than to examine or evaluate their performance as a novice SET. I assured novice SETs the collected data were not being shared with their supervisors and that pseudonyms would be used throughout the study.

Pseudonyms for participants and the school were used during the data collection process. Data collected during this study were secured utilizing several methods. Electronic data were stored in a password protected Google drive account only accessible by the researcher. All paper documentation was stored in a locked fireproof box in the researcher’s home.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected utilizing interviews, audio recorded mentor-SET meetings, and mentor journals. When using a case study research design, triangulation is important (i.e., using several methods of data collection to provide deep and valid evidence in support of the case; Saldaña, 2016). Yin (2014) suggests that since a case study occurs in a real-world setting, data collection strategies should be carefully chosen to best capture that setting. Procedures and purposes for these methods are explained in the following subsections.

Interviews

Interviews were utilized for this research study since the goal of the case study was to gain an understanding of mentors’ perspectives regarding their own knowledge and skills. Yin (2014) stated that interviews are valuable for gathering case study evidence as they allow participants to provide important insights and can identify additional sources of evidence for the
researcher based on responses provided, such as historical information about policies, procedures, or past experiences. Multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted with mentor teachers during the 2019-2020 school year. A semi-structured interview format allowed me to obtain information outlined in the interview protocol while also allowing me to respond to a participant’s new idea or topic revealed through the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Four interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes in length, were conducted with each mentor teacher. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder to best capture what was shared. Questions included in interview protocols (see Appendix D) were intended to help understand a) what knowledge and skills mentor teachers utilized when providing support to novice SETs, b) how they perceived they were utilizing their knowledge and skills, c) what mentor teachers identified as the most and least significant needs of novice SETs and why, and d) how mentor teachers enacted their role as an educative mentor. Initial interviews were conducted in October of the 2019-2020 school year, second interviews were conducted in December, third in February, and final interview was in April. Interviews were conducted in-person except for the April interview, which was conducted via Zoom due to a global pandemic not allowing in-person interactions. Interviews were scheduled on this timeline to better understand how mentor teachers adapted their mentoring practice over time. Schwille (2008) noted educative mentors must understand their novices as learners and adapt their practice to meet novices’ needs.

A panel of three educators reviewed the interview protocols prior to beginning the interviews. They were asked to provide feedback on the clarity and order of the questions as well as their relation to the research questions. Patten (2014) suggested that conducting a trial (i.e.,
review of an instrument) improves the content and, therefore, the validity of the results. The panel was comprised of two professors from Northern Illinois University: one special education professor and another professor who specializes in induction and mentoring practices. In addition, the Executive Director from Voyager School, who has a doctoral degree in instructional technology, was on the panel.

During the research proposal meeting the two professors from Northern Illinois University provided feedback on the interview protocol. They noted that while interviews were semi-structured, consideration should be given to additional questions being added to the interview protocol for richer data. The third panel member, the Executive Director from Voyager, asked questions about the chosen order of interview questions and their similarities for each interview. The rationale was that interviews were semi-structured, which offered an opportunity for asking additional questions in the moment. No significant changes were made to the interview protocols.

Mentor-SET Meetings

Audio recorded mentor-SET meetings, considered as a form of observations in this study, were used to discover how the mentor utilized her knowledge and skills during educative mentoring activities. The use of observations (e.g., audio recorded mentor-SET meetings) in qualitative research allows the researcher to experience something firsthand and notice things that may be commonplace to the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While reviewing the mentor-SET meeting recordings, I focused on interactions and dialogue between mentor teachers and novice SETs to understand how mentors utilized their knowledge and skills. Paying attention to interactions and dialogue allowed me to determine various strategies each mentor teacher used
when providing support to novice SETs. Feiman-Nemser (2001) utilized a similar method in her case study of an educative mentor when she examined how the mentor enacted his role and how he reflected on assisting novice teachers learn to teach.

A total of eight mentor-SET meetings were recorded during the 2019-2020 school year. Four mentor-SET meetings with each mentor were recorded; two mentor-SET meetings each were recorded with two individual novice SETs. All audio recordings of mentor-SET meetings were transcribed. Mentor-SET meeting recordings occurred in October and January. Mentor-SET meeting recording had also been scheduled for March 2020; however, due to a global pandemic, the recordings in March were cancelled as Voyager was closed. Each mentor-SET meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes.

**Mentor Journals**

Mentor journals were also utilized as a data collection method since this study focused on mentors’ knowledge and skills. Utilizing personal documents, such as journals, can provide perspective on the mentors’ experiences and the sense they make of the experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While it can be subjective, documentation in the mentors’ journal can reveal what they deem is important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Mentors were expected to maintain an electronic journal throughout the 2019-2020 school year, beginning in September and ending in April (i.e., 8 total monthly entries). The mentors were sent a Google form containing four journal prompts for September through February. An additional prompt (for a total of five) was added during March and April to gather data specific to the global pandemic. I emailed the Google form to mentor teachers once a month and asked them to return their written responses to me electronically within three days of
receiving the prompts. I informed mentors their written responses to the prompts could be completed in no more than 10 minutes.

Journal prompts focused on mentors’ perceptions of how they provided educative mentoring to novice SETs, needs of novice SETs, and each mentor’s perceptions of what knowledge and skills they utilized during mentoring sessions (see Appendix E). Examples of journal prompts included 1) This month my novice SETs seemed to do well with … and struggled with… and 2) I felt most effective as a mentor this month when…. The purpose of the mentor journals was to help me better understand and explore the depth and complexity of the mentors’ role and their perceptions of their knowledge and skills (Langdon & Ward, 2014).

Alignment

Table 3.1 depicts the alignment of data collection strategies and which combination of findings was intended to answer each research question. Table 3.2 provides a timeline for data collection strategies.

Table 3.1

Alignment between Data Collection Strategies and Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Mentor-SET Meetings</th>
<th>Mentor Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What knowledge and skills does a mentor perceive are needed to provide educative mentoring to novice SETs?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How does a mentor utilize her knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following section describes the data analysis procedures, including steps that were taken to ensure the data’s trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Several methods of data collection were utilized to answer the research questions. Utilizing multiple data collection methods to corroborate the same findings, also known as triangulation, ensures that construct validity and reliability were addressed (Yin, 2014). Triangulation allowed me to understand mentors’ experiences more accurately. In addition, data triangulation develops more precise findings and established a stronger case.

Saldaña (2016) suggests data analysis can be an underdeveloped aspect of case study research, particularly for a novice researcher. To be successful in data analysis, Saldaña recommends researchers have analytical strategies to guide them through the process. Yin (2014) suggests the purpose for developing analytic strategies is to link data to concepts in the study, thereby giving direction during data analysis to the researcher. Data analysis strategies utilized for this study included data coding procedures and data trustworthiness procedures. These data analysis strategies are described next.
Data Coding

Transcripts from interviews, mentor-SET meeting audio recording transcripts, and mentor journals were coded using a two-cycle coding method. In the first cycle, open coding was utilized in which codes and categories were not predetermined but were developed as the data were analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During open coding, I was able to reflect on nuances within data and begin to develop categories for further analysis.

During open coding, the definition of educative mentor (see Appendix A) was referenced, and the research questions were considered as the codes were developed. Codes were not predetermined, but rather arose throughout data analysis. Table 3.3 provides some examples of codes assigned to data during the first cycle coding.

Table 3.3
Examples of Open Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Code</th>
<th></th>
<th>Number sense importance</th>
<th>Validating novice's stress</th>
<th>Building trust</th>
<th>Lesson planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The number sense thing is the biggest thing too, because I think of money skills.” (Mentor-SET Meeting 7)</td>
<td>“I get it. It can be stressful.” (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)</td>
<td>“I think it actually helps me build a level of trust, just that I know what they’re going through.” (Interview 6)</td>
<td>“She was talking about her lesson planning and how she’s struggling with the curriculum.” (Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Codes were then organized into categories and assigned descriptive category names. For example, codes such as 1) “in the moment emotional support,” 2) “provide safe place to vent,”
and 3) “reassuring novice’s decision” were categorized as “providing emotional support.”

Organizing data using this approach allowed me to begin to see emerging themes.

The second-cycle utilized focused coding in which data were categorized based on themes and conceptual similarities. In focused coding, a researcher does not passively read data but instead actively interacts with the data and makes decisions about initial codes and categories (Charmaz, 2006). This phase of coding differs from the initial phase in that examination of codes and categories becomes more directed so the researcher can begin to see relationships within the data (Saldaña, 2016).

During focused coding, categories were examined for potential relationships and grouped according to similarities in their content. A first-cycle category needed to have at least five coded comments to be grouped into a second-cycle category. This approach resulted in a reduced number of categories. Grouped categories were then assigned new and broader codes, thus revealing subthemes and themes. Figure 3.1 provides a brief overview of how themes developed through the grouping of categories into subthemes and then into themes.

![Figure 3.1 Development of themes from categories.](image-url)
In this example, the categories listed support each subtheme as they were considered smaller aspects of each. The two subthemes, providing feedback and asking questions, support the overall theme of guiding the novices’ thinking.

Data Trustworthiness

Several analytic strategies were utilized during data analysis to ensure trustworthiness of collected data. First, analytic memo writing allowed me to make connections between pieces of data from different data collection methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The significance of analytic memo writing comes from the lens or filter used by the researcher to reflect on and think critically about the data (Saldaña, 2016). Analytic memos were written after recordings of mentor interviews and mentor-SET meetings were transcribed to examine how mentors were enacting their roles and utilizing strategies. Memos were also used to draw connections between interview responses and dialogue from mentor-SET meetings. Table 3.4 provides examples of analytic memos written during data analysis.

The first analytic memo example was written after reviewing Nancy’s interactions with her novice SET during a mentor-SET meeting. I noticed a difference in Nancy’s mentor skills compared to those of Isabelle, whose transcripts I had previously reviewed. I noted questions in the memo to consider as I reviewed additional mentor-SET meeting transcripts. In the second analytic memo, I noted how Isabelle considered self-reflection to promote novices’ growth, which was eventually identified as a theme in the data.
Analytic Memo Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th><em>Mentor-SET Meeting 5</em></th>
<th><em>Interview 1</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analytic Memo</strong></td>
<td>“In comparing Nancy and Isabelle’s mentoring skills there does seem to be a difference in what each of them describes as the strategies they used and the biggest needs of the novice teachers. Could this be because of the difference in the experience level of the mentors? Or the personality of the mentor?”</td>
<td>“She [Isabelle] describes how she is thinking about how she can help her novice teachers grow by using self-reflection.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, member checks were utilized at various stages in data collection and analysis processes. In a qualitative research study, member checks are used to verify a participant’s response and solicit feedback from the participant on emerging findings (Mertens, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the data collection process, member checks were used at the beginning of mentor teacher interviews when this researcher asked follow-up questions for clarification on responses from previous interviews. Additionally, member checks were utilized during the initial data analysis phase of the mentor journals when participants were asked to clarify their responses to journal prompts. Prior to interviews with the mentors, I reviewed the transcripts from the previous interviews, mentor-SET meetings, journal responses, and analytic memos. I noted any portions of the data where clarification was needed from mentors. Additional questions were added to individual mentor’s interview protocol to clarify previous responses or to prompt more in-depth discussion of previously asked questions. Because the research questions in this study examine participants’ perceptions, it was paramount that misinterpreting
or misunderstanding participants’ responses does not occur. Utilizing member checks ensured that internal validity existed during data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell). Mentors were responsive to providing clarification and willing to share examples from their mentoring practice. No significant changes were made to the data or interpretation of the data. Using member checks served to validate my analysis and interpretation of the data.

Conclusion

The research method described in this chapter provided an overview for the study that examined the mentors’ perceptions of the knowledge and skills they needed when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs. Data were collected through interviews, audio recorded mentor-SET meetings, and mentor journals and then were analyzed using a two-step coding process. Data trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, analytic memo writing, and member checking. Findings from the data analysis are presented in the following chapters. Voices and experiences for each mentor are shared separately. Chapter 4 presents the findings for Nancy and Chapter 5 presents the findings for Isabelle.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: NANCY’S MENTOR JOURNEY

Chapter 4 focuses on Nancy’s path as a mentor. First, a description of Nancy’s background, including her experience as a teacher and mentor, and how she helped Isabelle enhance her mentoring skills is provided. Next, findings for the first theme, guiding novices’ thinking, are presented, including discussion of its two subthemes: instructional strategies and IEP development. Lastly, the findings for the second theme, building relationships are presented through a discussion of the two subthemes: emotional support and building trust.

Background

Nancy’s long brown hair and conservative and casual attire defined a level of maturity not always found in someone in their mid-twenties. Her bright eyes hinted at the empathy she had and often used in her mentoring role. Nancy felt a sense of fulfillment, sharing that as a mentor she enjoyed coaching others’ growth and success by focusing on their strengths. In addition, she felt a great sense of responsibility as a mentor and held herself to a high standard to succeed.

Prior to becoming a mentor and instructional coach, Nancy had spent four years teaching special education. Her first year was in a public-school inclusion setting where she co-taught classes and provided resource support for kindergarten and fifth grade students. Seeking a different type of teaching experience, Nancy then taught at Voyager for three years where her
students were in fourth through eighth grades and had autism spectrum disorders. Teaching in public and therapeutic day school settings provided Nancy with contrasting experiences. In addition, working with a wide range of grades also allowed Nancy to have varied teaching experiences. She felt having these diverse experiences would be helpful to her work as a mentor.

The broader experience you have the better. I think because whenever I feel most successful, it's when I can relate to what they’re [mentees] talking about so that I can help them brainstorm. Or I know where to go with my questioning to lead them to some kind of conclusion. (Interview 6)

Having had similar experiences to her mentees, Nancy could relate to their problems of practice then adjust her mentoring strategies to guide them to solutions.

The 2019-2020 school year was Nancy’s third year as a mentor; however, it was only her second being full-time in the role. During Nancy’s first year as a mentor, she maintained her own classroom as a full-time teacher while also addressing the needs of two novice teachers. Nancy felt she initially struggled with mentoring due to balancing her own workload with her mentees’ needs. Nancy felt she initially struggled with mentoring due to balancing her own workload with her mentees’ needs. She reflected on her experience as a full-time teacher and mentor:

As a teacher, I didn't feel like I would sit down and dedicate that time to them [novices]. But then oftentimes my own workload withheld me from thinking through what else I could do or putting my thought and effort into supporting them. And I never got to see them in action. I had no idea what the struggles were because I didn't get to go see them teach. (Interview 5)

During her second-year, Nancy became full-time in the role and was able to focus solely on the needs of her novice teachers. She appreciated providing mentoring support and saw it as an opportunity to observe the different teaching styles of her novices in their classrooms. Nancy was energized by making connections and supporting novices while also learning from them.
Nancy provided support to four novice teachers (Charlotte, Rita, Maria, Naomi) who all had various levels of teaching experience. Charlotte was in her second year as a teacher and also had Nancy as her mentor during her initial year of teaching. Rita was in her first year of teaching after having graduated from a teacher preparation program at a large Illinois university. Maria, a novice Nancy and Isabelle co-mentored, was brand new to being an in-service practitioner but had previous experience as a paraprofessional. Naomi had multiple years of experience as a special education teacher in a public-school, but this was her first in a therapeutic day school setting.

Additionally, Nancy also provided mentoring support to Isabelle, a new mentor. Nancy felt Isabelle needed help reshaping her mindset to focus more on solving problems and finding solutions and knew it was important for Isabelle not to become frustrated when she felt a situation was out of her control. For example, Nancy recounted how she had expressed to Isabelle the importance of being open-minded and listening to her mentees when providing them with support.

I think I just learned to never judge a book by its cover. And as much as you think you’re prepared or know what someone might need, you don’t. It all comes down to listening to them. We [Isabelle and I] talked a lot about April and how she’s coming from a similar setting and has some years of experience. But April had a lot of things come up and we just couldn’t predict the sort of things that came up for her. [I reminded Isabelle] just always go into it [mentoring] with an open-mind and listen. Just start by listening. (Interview 8)

Nancy felt she could provide feedback to Isabelle to enhance her mentoring skills because they had developed a trusting relationship. Open dialogue allowed Nancy and Isabelle to discuss problems of practice. Nancy explained:

I’ve actively worked with Isabelle, and I feel like I’ve had success with her. I think part of it is that we spend so much time together and have such a trusted relationship that she
will openly talk about anything and think out loud and problem solve. Then I can navigate her brain more and help her shift where her thoughts are going. (Interview 8)

Nancy knew it was necessary to keep an open mind when providing support to novices. Sharing this need with Isabelle was critical, and Nancy felt was aided by a trusting relationship.

Themes

Data were collected from four semi-structured interviews, four audio recorded mentor-SET teacher mentoring sessions, and mentor journal entries. Two major themes were identified: guiding novices’ thinking and building relationships (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Major Themes with Subthemes for Nancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 1: Guiding Novice’s Thinking</th>
<th># of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP Development</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 2: Building Relationships</th>
<th># of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Emotional Support</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Trust</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings for the two themes and associated subthemes form the remainder of the chapter. Nancy’s voice and those of novice teachers she mentored are woven throughout themes and subthemes to reveal the strategies used.

**Theme 1: Guiding Novices’ Thinking**

Nancy knew her role as a mentor was to help her novice teachers solve their problems of practice rather than simply provide solutions for novices. She felt having all the answers was not critical; however, being able to help novices self-reflect was essential. Nancy commented,

> It’s not that I have to have the answers, it’s that I have to help them question what they’re doing to find their own answers. There’s a lot of times they have the answers. They just have to self-reflect and look at it [their problem and solution]. (Interview 6)

To promote self-reflection by her novices, Nancy guided their thinking, utilizing strategies such as providing feedback and asking questions when discussing their problems of practice. Nancy was purposeful when guiding the novices’ thinking by often having a goal in mind and then choosing questions or feedback. Advance preparation, discussion structure, and a mentor toolbox allowed Nancy to guide novices to the goal she had in mind. Her preparation permitted her to probe novices’ thinking and assess where their knowledge might be lacking. Nancy could then fill in a potential knowledge gap or help a novice arrive at a solution. Remaining flexible in her approach allowed Nancy to reasonably understand a novice’s knowledge gap.

Two subthemes, or focal areas, that arose from data were instructional strategies and IEP development (see Table 4.1). Nancy guided novices’ thinking in these areas by providing feedback and asking questions. The first subtheme, instructional strategies, was supported by 117 comments. The second subtheme was IEP development, which was substantiated by 108
comments. The following sections describe how Nancy guided her novices’ thinking in these two focal areas by providing feedback and asking questions.

**Instructional Strategies**

Nancy recognized her novice teachers needed support with instructional strategies (e.g., identifying resources and teaching skills). Feeling it was important for novices to be effective in their planning, Nancy provided feedback on resources that could be used to teach more successfully and/or to simplify their work. Nancy framed her feedback after observing novices using resources in their classrooms. She described her approach:

I’m really looking for the structure, the visuals, what’s going on. And then looking at if the materials and resources they’re using are engaging their students, are connecting with their students, to see if that’s part of the problem.

I go in looking to see how teachers are using our resources so that I can help connect them to other teachers or problem solve with them. Or if they’re not using our resources, figuring out why or how much time they’re spending planning. Then I try and make their world easier.

I feel like observations are me just trying to assess resources and how things are going. Yesterday I did an observation in transition to see resources. I wanted to see how it was going. So I popped into a classroom and just supported and observed to make sure that the resources were applicable and very easy to use. They [resources] were being used really great. But if it wasn’t going well, I probably would set up a meeting to discuss it and modify or change [the resources]. (Interview 6)

Even though in the last instance Nancy did not need to provide feedback about modifying resources, she had a plan for how she would guide the novice’s thinking about making changes that would meet students’ needs.

Feedback was also given on instructional resources when novices were struggling with how to use resources effectively in the classroom. Nancy’s feedback was intended to help her mentees understand how a resource might be used differently than a mentee planned. For
example, Rita mentioned how she struggled using an interactive resource with her students who were working at different paces, so Nancy suggested adapting how the resource was presented during the lesson to make it more effective.

Rita: You need to have like a file folder [activity] or things to do with them because they need to be doing things together. But they’re always at a different pace.

Nancy: What if you took the opposite approach? Where they are not doing things, individually, but you’re doing them jointly. So even if you did a file folder, they’re not both doing it. They both might have pieces, but they’re creating one together with you.

Rita: Yeah! I like that.

Nancy: Because then they’re easier for you to keep them on pace. (Mentor-SET Meeting 6)

In another example, Rita had observed a more experienced teacher using a reading curriculum she also wanted to incorporate into her lessons. Nancy suggested how Rita could adapt the reading curriculum since she was not very skilled in using it yet.

Nancy: So the way he adapted the book essentially was he picked a few key visuals and was essentially modifying the story on the fly. Like he was making it shorter.

Rita: Yeah, he was. He said he reads it prior to the lesson. Then if it’s two umbrellas in the story, he has many pictures of multiple types of umbrellas. Then he’ll pull out the picture and tell a little story about that picture and then have them [the students] count the umbrellas. He makes it up on the fly.

Nancy: I’m wondering…as you’re learning how to modify the stories, so you don’t have to think about it on the fly since it’s still new to you and he’s been using it for a year now and has a groove, if you created Google slides of the story. Then you just printed your Google slides because then you have the visual that the students could be touching or interacting with. You can put the words on the Google slides for yourself. (Mentor-SET Meeting 6)
Providing feedback on resources was not the only way Nancy supported her novices with instructional strategies. She also guided their thinking when novices had a method in mind for teaching a skill but wanted Nancy’s feedback for further guidance. For example, Charlotte sought Nancy’s guidance on teaching addition.

Nancy: So I would maybe go with manipulatives because it’s just more clear-cut that two means two things.

Charlotte: Can I show you what I’m thinking? Here it would be a mat [visual support for teaching addition], and he knew this was for the numbers. And this is for like two plus three and he would put them in here. It could also help him work on one-to-one correspondence. Like he would know he needs two here and then three here. It’s like very clear for him.

Nancy: Totally! You could even color code these boxes like these are blue and these are yellow. So it’s clear that these two are correlated. I like that it’s set up like this too. Then all he has to do is slide them down to count to the answer.
(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

Similar to Charlotte, Rita was unsure about the best instructional method for teaching a student how to count. Nancy’s feedback helped Rita decide how to teach a skill and advance the student’s accuracy.

Rita: So do you think it would be effective to put blocks on these or do you think a box on top of them so that they’re not accessible? Like it’s only up here. And then if we’re working on one through three, then you only have these five options.

Nancy: Yes. Once you increase it to five, I would show the second row though. Just to make sure he’s not stopping counting because he already knows the numbers.

Rita: Cool. Well then, I’m going to make one of these without the numbers so that when we get closer to the end of the quarter, I’ll take the numbers out and see if we can do the same thing. I feel like doing the smaller numbers we’ll be able to increase his percentage of accuracy.
(Mentor-SET Meeting 8)
Feedback on instructional strategies also addressed behavioral concerns novices had with their students. For instance, Charlotte considered a new strategy to address a student’s inappropriate behavior when Nancy provided feedback after observing a student during a challenging situation.

Nancy: If you just had a visual where he’d have to touch [the word] work or you could write in where he is supposed to go, I feel like that might buy the staff time. Because when it happened yesterday there was no time for the staff to react as he was up and running again so quickly. If they had a quick visual, it might buy them some time.

Charlotte: I think that is definitely what’s hard is because we’re just used to this continuously happening. We haven’t had a chance to figure out what to do next.

Nancy: I’m curious what happens if he disengages because then he’s seated, which seems to be more successful to get him back on track. It’s like if you guys can quickly try those things and see how they go.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

As Nancy and Charlotte discussed the student’s challenging behavior, Charlotte mentioned a strategy she had considered trying. Drawing from her past experiences, Nancy guided Charlotte’s thinking further.

Charlotte: I want to see after every session maybe having a check-in system where we would ask him, [questions about his behavior]

Nancy: And you can maybe incorporate the sorry note too. Then [he can understand], I did destroy someone else’s space. Then you can say like okay, let’s write our sorry note.

Charlotte: And it could even be a template where he’s just filling in all the things.

Nancy: Like ‘I’m sorry’ and his name. The only thing I think you would want to process if you do go the sorry note route, I’ve seen several cases where it turns into like a power struggle. It becomes like punishment versus a learning experience. So, not that that would happen, but something to consider how you roll it out to your staff, if you go the sorry note route.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)
In the previous instance, Nancy’s support focused on instructional strategies for a specific student. However, she also guided novices’ thinking about instructional strategies used to plan group lessons more effectively. For example, Nancy described a time she used questioning to help Rita improve the structure of her academic groups. Recognizing Rita already had group planning knowledge, Nancy framed her questions so additional instructional strategies could be considered.

She has a lot of great lesson planning knowledge. And she’s got some good autism knowledge, but her groups still have a long way to come to be well oiled. So we talk about her groups. And I do a lot of coaching: How does it look between these different days? How fast are you going? What’s the structure look like? Did you try something new? What were the differences? If you were going to pick one part of this to tweak, what would you tweak? (Interview 7)

In another example, Nancy asked Rita questions combined with comments meant to focus Rita’s thinking about additional math skills to target during her lessons.

Nancy: After you do your warm-up with the book are you continuing to only focus on number identification and one-to-one correspondence? Or are you looking at any of the other objectives?

Rita: Right now it’s counting.

Nancy: Okay.

Rita: Yeah, because that’s a lot of their [students’] goals. I’m trying to cater it towards that for right now and then move on to probably patterns or something.

Nancy: And you can always incorporate a little bit of combining [number] sets because most of that is number identification and one-to-one correspondence. It’s really getting them ready for learning actual equations.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 6)
Nancy used questions initially to help her understand the focus of Rita’s lesson. She then provided feedback that included an additional instructional strategy intended to strengthen Rita’s lesson.

Supporting novices with instructional strategies also included guidance on collecting student progress data. While a mentee may have identified a strategy to be used to teach a skill, support was needed for defining what constituted correct responses. For instance, Nancy guided Rita’s thinking about her definition of a student’s accuracy of spelling words by asking questions about the instructional strategy.

Nancy: So when you’re envisioning taking data on this, you’re giving him three letters with spaces? So I’m guessing this is bug? How many letters would you have out for him? Is it just the three and he has to sequence them?

Rita: I’m thinking four, like I’m going to get…

Nancy: Like a distractor?

Rita: Because with three [letters] he was getting 100 percent.

Nancy: So let’s say he spells this word wrong. Let’s say he selects an L instead of a B. But U G is correct. How would you count that for data? Would this whole thing be a plus or minus? Or are you counting it as one out of three or two out of three, correct?

Rita: I’m going to say all or nothing.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 6)

By asking a series of questions, Nancy was able to guide Rita toward a definition of spelling accuracy for collecting data.

The novices often initiated the need for support with instructional strategies. In these instances, Nancy also utilized questioning to guide thinking because she wanted mentees to arrive at their own conclusions. For example, Charlotte struggled with continuing to use a math strategy with a student who had been inconsistently demonstrating a skill.
Charlotte: But it also would help him understand, like this will help you count. Or should I not include the touchpoints?

Nancy: If you include the touchpoints, then you’re stuck to that strategy. And knowing him, I would be worried that then if you presented addition in any other [way] he’ll just get too stuck on that.

Charlotte: Right now, what I’m noticing is we’ve been working on addition in [math] group. I would say he doesn’t know them, but he’s memorizing them.

Nancy: So he’s like two plus two and he can say four. Do you think he understands the concept of it [addition]?

Charlotte: No. I know he doesn’t.

Nancy: So, I would maybe go with manipulatives then, because it’s just more clear cut that like two means two things.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

Because Nancy felt it was important for her mentees to arrive at their own conclusions, her question led Charlotte to realize her student was not understanding the math skill.

Nancy found her mentees needed support with instructional strategies, such as adapting resources, teaching academic and behavioral skills, and lesson planning. Helping novices arrive at their own solutions to their problems of practice was important to Nancy, so she provided feedback and asked questions to guide novices’ thinking. Instructional strategies were not the only area of practice where support was needed. Development of individual education plans (IEPs) was another area where Nancy found novices needed her guidance.

**IEP Development**

Helping novice teachers with IEP development was another area in which Nancy used feedback to guide their thinking (108 comments). While she felt the novices had some knowledge of developing IEPs, there was a continual need for support in each of the six steps of
the process. While novices had a foundational understanding of the IEP process, Nancy felt they did not have the in-depth knowledge required. She wanted to ensure novices were not only comfortable, but proficient with developing IEPs for their students. To highlight her IEP development work with novices throughout the year, Nancy shared, “We go through the IEP process together. I feel we do it from step one all the way through the actual IEP [meeting]” (Interview 5).

Prior to providing goal writing assistance, Nancy used feedback to increase novices’ understanding of assessment. Feeling they lacked knowledge and experience, Nancy’s feedback was often direct with the goal of reducing support as the novice gained skills. Systematic in her approach to giving feedback on assessment, Nancy encouraged novices to become more independent when administering them. She modeled the assessments and then offered feedback in the moment as the novice attempted administration on their own. In the following example, Nancy talked with Rita about familiarizing her with an assessment through modeling.

Nancy: So we briefly talked about the assessment that we thought was appropriate for him. So let’s look a little further into that for a few minutes. So we started to look at the different portions.

Rita: We were marking which ones we were thinking.

Nancy: So what I would love to do is look at times where we could pull him together. And the first time, like I’ll model how to do it and I’ll model how I took the data and how I assessed it and how to fill this in. And then for the second time, we’ll flip flop. And then I’ll let you fly and finish the testing. And then we can look at it together.

Rita: Come back and evaluate it?

Nancy: Yeah. And then use it to try to formulate some goals for him. (Mentor-SET Meeting 6)
Before modeling the assessment, Nancy described sample questions and how data should be collected during administration. In addition, her feedback included how to adapt the assessment if the student was having difficulty providing an answer.

Nancy: Let’s look at just one example here. So, let’s look at B5.

Rita: OK, that’s match identical pictures to a sample.

Nancy: So usually I read all of this just to make sure I’m understanding it. So, when given a picture, the student will match to an identical picture, in an array of three pictures. So, here’s the array of three. Technically for this one you could cover the other ones. I have a feeling Donnie (pseudonym) doesn’t need us to block them. But if he seems to struggle you can always block them and it gives you how to prompt. It just restates it pretty much. So, then it tells you the score breakdown. So to get a score of four he needs to match at least ten.

Rita: So the direction would be “match”? Donnie match.

Nancy: Then you would hand it to him, and he would hopefully match them all. And then you count how many he did right as he does it, then just circle it here. Sometimes if it’s hectic or you’re doing things just like jot down notes. Or if he missed one, indicate what he missed.

After completing the assessments, feedback was also given to novices to guide their thinking when developing IEP goals based on the results. For example, Charlotte was unsure if her assessment results were accurately being reflected in the summary report. Nancy offered feedback on what information should be included in the report and made suggestions for phrasing the summary.

Nancy: I think the way you split it up is fine. You still talk about his strengths and his areas for growth.

Charlotte: Do you think it matters that there are significantly more weaknesses?

Nancy: No, because I think this is really pushing him. Because before he had more of a functional one [IEP] and you really targeted some academic things here. I think it makes sense that he has more emerging skills.
Charlotte: Do you think the phrases that I use for suggested academic interventions make sense?

Nancy: Yeah, I think you could maybe add a statement about how you’re using the repetition to help build his confidence and push him, like patterned. I feel like repetition is the wrong word. Patterned. Something like, reading simple and patterned text to build fluency and confidence.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

In this instance, Charlotte had an idea for addressing a student’s skill, but she wanted Nancy’s reassurance she was heading in the right direction. Charlotte was honest with Nancy and admitted when she was struggling with identifying appropriate IEP goals in that a skill necessary for the student’s safety was identified through Nancy and Charlotte’s discussion.

Charlotte: I really struggle with Pham [pseudonym].

Nancy: He’s tricky because he doesn’t always show you what he knows. He has so many skills, but also barriers. I think in the future where he will go, but some of those barriers are huge.

Charlotte: I think safety is something. Like he’s still putting the hot water on all the time and gets upset if you turn it off.

Nancy: And that could be because of so many reasons. If you give him a bunch of scenarios, can he sort what’s dangerous and what’s safe?

Charlotte: I don’t know that he does. I think the problem is his sensory input is off. I think he just doesn’t feel pain.

Nancy: So he doesn’t realize that it’s dangerous, it could hurt him. It can be some kind of cause-and-effect IEP goal [you write]. Where it’s like if I put hot water on too long, I could burn myself. Or it’s like because of this, that happens.

Charlotte: That’s a really good one!

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

While Charlotte struggled to identify an appropriate IEP goal for Pham, Nancy’s feedback helped narrow her thinking to a goal focused on the student’s safety.
In another example, Nancy’s feedback helped Charlotte structure a math goal for a student who tended to memorize answers instead of learning the skill. Nancy felt Charlotte was focusing too heavily on the method used to teach the skill instead of keeping her goal broad.

Nancy: I guess you’ll probably keep it [the goal] pretty broad since he’s such a memorizer. So you don’t want to include exactly which teaching strategy. So it would be a really simple goal. Very basic. Because you will use different strategies and change them, so he doesn’t memorize.

Charlotte: Right, but I do think potentially it would make sense that we could do it [the goal] with touchpoints.

Nancy: Hmm, because he is a memorizer?

Charlotte: But it also would be helping him understand, like these will help you count. Or should I not include the touchpoints?

Nancy: If you include the touchpoints, then you’re stuck to that strategy. And knowing him, I would be worried that then if you presented addition in any other [way] that he’ll get too stuck on that.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

Nancy’s feedback helped Charlotte understand that broadening the focus of her math goal would allow options for teaching the skill.

Novices often had ideas about the IEP goals they felt would be important for their students to master. They sought Nancy’s input because they were not always feeling confident in their decisions. To support novices with different aspects of IEP goal development, such as identifying a goal’s focus or determining a student’s skill accuracy, Nancy guided their thinking. For example, Rita tried to determine the best goal for her student despite the IEP team having differing opinions. Nancy utilized questions to help Rita understand how the student’s area of challenge could be addressed through a goal and to guide Rita to see positive aspects of the student’s challenge.
Rita: I wanted your help on one of Kiya’s [pseudonym] goals. So we [the IEP team] went back and forth on global goals and not global goals. The occupational therapist wants to do globals. But it’s a 50/50 split of the [IEP] team wanting to do them, but the other half don’t want to do it. So I feel like we’re writing a behavioral goal where he will ask for things he wants appropriately instead of hitting.

Nancy: Like a functional communication goal?

Rita: Yeah, functional communication. And then another one you and I talked about, attending groups or something like that. He comes to groups, just not his appropriate group.

Nancy: [So something like] not following his schedule? He picks and chooses where he wants to be?

Rita: More often than not, he’s in the wrong group. I just want to put him in that group. I don’t know what to do.

Nancy: With the point he’s at, he’s at least getting some academics. Even though he knows more than that, he’s reviewing concepts he needs to maintain. So that’s good. (Mentor-SET Meeting 8)

Sometimes Rita and Charlotte needed help delineating different aspects of IEP goals, such as how to define a skill or how to determine progress on a goal. Being mindful of how she utilized mentoring strategies, Nancy believed she should not tell her novices how to determine each aspect of an IEP goal. Instead she empowered them to make their own decisions.

In one instance, Nancy and Charlotte discussed wording for a student’s math IEP goal. Charlotte decided she wanted the goal’s focus to be addition and subtraction. However, Nancy wanted Charlotte to think further about her definition of addition that would be included in the goal.

Charlotte: When given mixed numbers...or should I do it in isolation?

Nancy: I don’t think you need to write that part into the goal because they’ll be objectives.
Charlotte: Yeah. [I’ll write the goal as] given simple addition and subtraction.

Nancy: How do you define simple? Given single digit? Or within 10?

Charlotte: I think it would be no carrying.

Nancy: So single digit, probably. You never have to carry then.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 7)

By asking Charlotte to provide her definition of “simple addition,” Nancy guided the development of a more appropriate goal for the student.

Similarly, Nancy and Rita discussed how to determine a student’s progress on an IEP goal. Nancy used a question to guide Rita’s thinking and then followed it with feedback to affirm Rita’s choice.

Nancy: And then it looks like you were debating between either changing the number of words or the percentage. Where do you think you’re going to go with that one?

Rita: Let’s do percentage. Cuz for the letters is easier to stay the same. And the percentage can increase.

Nancy: And then it also doesn’t tie you to a certain number [of words] or keeping the same words. You know what I mean? If you’re like three words, then you’re targeting the same three words. Whereas this way you can keep changing it. It sounds like it will challenge him more.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 6)

In providing feedback after utilizing a question, Nancy helped Rita consider how her decision could impact a student’s learning.

IEP goal development feedback also guided novices’ thinking about other components, such as goal benchmarks. Nancy mentioned novices needed support with all portions of their IEP development, but Rita also needed Nancy’s support with identifying goal benchmarks.

Nancy: Yes, these would be benchmarks since they’re building. So the way I always remember the difference between benchmarks and objectives is that benchmarks are building. So like something is building, whether it’s
you have a number of directions or if the percentage is building. But the objectives are the thing to work on at the same time.

Rita: Benchmark is the one that you just have one thing change every quarter?

Nancy: Yeah, you’re adding on to it. Whereas objectives are like a goal where the student’s working on two things at once.

Rita: Like staying in the area and completing a task. It will take me a little bit, but I’ll get there.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 6)

Nancy’s feedback helped clarify differences between IEP goal benchmarks and objectives for Rita. While Rita knew she still needed to gain knowledge about IEPs, she felt the process was achievable. Whether Nancy was supporting mentees with identifying the focus of a goal or determining the accuracy level of a goal, there were areas in which they needed a lot of support. She noted in her September mentor journal on how she had been supporting novices with writing goals for the numerous IEPs they already had during the year. As such, providing feedback and asking questions were strategies Nancy used to support and empower her novices with developing IEP goals.

**Theme 2: Building Relationships**

Nancy knew that to be an effective mentor she needed to build relationships with her mentees, which is the second theme identified in the data. Assuming novices would respect her simply because she was a mentor was not realistic. Novices did not necessarily know Nancy’s level of experience as a mentor, so she felt she needed to earn their trust. For novices to be open about their problems of practice and teaching experiences, it was vital Nancy develop trusting relationships with them. She would not be able to guide their thinking by providing feedback or
asking questions if their relationships were not well rooted. Open dialogue and vulnerability needed a foundation of trust for Nancy to be effective in her role.

Knowing she needed to build strong relationships with her mentees, Nancy utilized two strategies: providing emotional support and building trust. Analysis of the data found 70 comments attributed to providing emotional support and 22 comments attributed to building trust (see Table 4.1). The following sections provide a description of how Nancy built relationships with her novice teachers by providing emotional support and establishing their trust.

Providing Emotional Support

A principal approach Nancy used to establish relationships with her novices was providing emotional support, which meant Nancy taking an interest in novices’ challenges with the intention they develop confidence, resilience, and self-reliance (Billingsley, et al., 2004). Nancy felt she could better connect with her mentees when she understood their struggles or was responsive to their successes. Her empathy and excitement needed to be genuine for her to form connections and validate novices.

Nancy realized developing connections with novices was not always easy. But remaining non-judgmental and empathetic helped her build their relationships. For example, Nancy described a relationship building experience she had with Naomi.

I think at first, Naomi had a pretty hard time building a relationship with me. I stayed very open minded and tried to be very non-judgmental and respectful. I think we have built a really strong relationship. And I felt very validated when we met this week because she’s opening up to me about things that she clearly doesn’t feel comfortable talking to other people about. And like at the end [of our mentor-SET meeting] she was just like, thank you for always being a safe place for me, someone to help figure it all out. That makes me feel very validated because I tried very, very, very hard to be that person for her in a place where she didn’t feel like she had someone. (Interview 8)
In this instance, it took some time for Naomi to view Nancy as a confidante. However, Nancy’s empathy and accepting demeanor helped Naomi see her as a safe person to confide in. There were times when novices knew they needed emotional support but did not fully understand where to seek it. So, Nancy shared how she helped novices understand how she could support their emotional needs.

I think they [novices] need a safe place to process all of their feelings. And that safe place, which I try to help them understand, is not in their classroom [with their staff]. So I try to help them understand that you’re allowed to feel your feelings and you can always feel those with me. I will help you process them and then help you grow. But I feel like it’s just so much to take in. And if you don’t have an outlet, then you’ll just erupt. And I feel like it’s super important that they have an outlet here. (Interview 6)

Nancy provided another example of the importance of teachers receiving emotional support and having a safe space to share their feelings. Lynn was a teacher Nancy had previously mentored, but now being in her third year at Voyager, she no longer regularly met with Nancy. However, Nancy continued to provide Lynn with emotional and professional support when needed, which made a significant impact on Lynn remaining at the school.

Honestly, Lynn has been very upfront with me that I’m one of the big reasons she’s still here. [I] just remind her that even though we don’t meet on a weekly basis, she can text me, she can always schedule time, we can always have lunch together. And she was literally crying and saying, “Thank you so much. It means so much to me that I can talk to you.” But I feel like she needs that reminder often. She feels like a burden even asking for it [i.e., help]. (Interview 6)

Even though Lynn needed reassurance, Nancy was there to provide emotional support. Lynn was grateful to receive it. This was true of Nancy’s other mentees as well. Emotional support was often needed by mentees and was a strategy Nancy utilized to build relationships, but mentees did not always seek out the support. Nancy was aware novices sometimes needed prompting to share their emotional state. For example, in the following exchange Nancy probed Charlotte about how she was feeling, which opened the conversation to a problem of practice.
Nancy: How are you feeling?

Charlotte: I’m good.

Nancy: That face tells me maybe not.

Charlotte: No, I’m good. We just came back from our outing which was so much better than I thought it would be because we went on the train.

Nancy: You went on the train? That’s cool!

Charlotte: Yeah, but there were just so many things I didn’t think through. Like I mean it’s not necessarily on me to think through those things. But usually I try to problem solve.

Nancy: You are obviously preparing them [the students] really well.

Charlotte: Yeah, but I want the social worker to plan things. Like she needs to think through the problems. (Mentor-SET Meeting 5)

By simply asking about her current emotional state, Nancy was able to sense from Charlotte’s response (i.e., facial expression) there was a problem she wanted to discuss. During the discussion, Nancy provided emotional support to acknowledge the challenge Charlotte had planning for the community outing.

Emotional support was used as a strategy to build relationships when novices were struggling with a problem. But when novices had successfully solved a problem, Nancy also used emotional support to provide encouragement and promote self-confidence. Nancy commented, “I feel like that reassurance helps build their confidence” (Interview 7). She felt emotional support could enhance the novices’ belief in themselves.

Another example included Rita who was having difficulties with staff communication in her classroom. After seeking Nancy’s feedback, Rita implemented some changes with the hope of improving communication with her staff. During a mentor-SET meeting, Nancy provided Rita with emotional support by reassuring her about a positive impact she made.
Nancy: I feel like you’ve handled this change in stride and have been very proactive with your team which is awesome.

Rita: I’m trying. I told them yesterday. I said, I know I’m aware of my weaknesses, and I want to be better. But sometimes my brain just gets all caught up and then I don’t fix them. But I told them [the staff], I said, I want to have more open communication this quarter or rest of the year. I want you to know that I’m a safe person. So I just introduced that again yesterday. Hopefully it set in with them.

Nancy: I love that you said that very openly. And then you follow it up right away with a very open conversation. That’s amazing. Great leadership!

(Mentor-SET Meeting 8)

Nancy recognized Rita had handled a difficult situation with her staff well. In wanting to share her approval of Rita’s success, Nancy provided emotional support by pointing out her achievements (e.g., being proactive, leadership).

Providing emotional support helped Nancy connect with her novices regarding their struggles and their successes. But Nancy thought there was another benefit to providing emotional support, “Honestly, I feel like the more emotional support I give, the more trust I gain sometimes” (Interview 6). Feeling emotional support and trust were connected, Nancy utilized both strategies to build relationships with her mentees.

Building Trust

Trust was a necessary element in Nancy’s mentor-mentee relationships (22 comments). She knew if she wanted to help her novices solve their problems of practice, they would need to know they could depend on her when seeking support. Nancy strived to be relatable to build trust with her mentees. She wanted them to feel comfortable with her as a person and as a mentor.

Nancy commented,
I try to always start by telling them about me on a personal level, so that they see me as a person. Try to find something they can relate to, whether it’s an interest or what we like about school or what we like to do outside of work. I always try to communicate very openly and transparently about things so that they know what I say is what they’re going to get. I’m going to follow through and be dependable. (Interview 5)

Feeling not only her words were important when building trust with novices, Nancy felt her actions were important too. Being present was essential, meaning Nancy spent time in her novices’ classrooms getting to know the students and understanding the novices’ struggles. Having firsthand knowledge about the mentees’ needs allowed her to provide more relevant feedback.

So I definitely try to jump in to model working with their [novices’] students. Be present so that they see I know their kids and if I don’t, I’m willing to get to know them. [We can] problem solve and talk about things so that they feel like when they come to me about something, I have knowledge about the student. My suggestions will be helpful rather than just shots in the dark. (Interview 5)

While spending time in novices’ classrooms provided Nancy with knowledge about students and problems of practice, it also gave her a level of credibility. Experiencing situations alongside novices helped increase their trust in Nancy. She shared how she felt this would improve her ability to discuss novices’ problems with them.

I think being in classrooms actually helps me build a level of trust, just that I know what they’re going through. I’m there with them, and I’m there physically to support them in the moment so that when we talk about things, they don’t think I’m just agreeing to agree or something like that. That I will have a better understanding of what they’re talking about because I’ve seen it. (Interview 6)

Nancy provided an example of a time a mentee had a new student whose needs were significant and unfamiliar to the novice. To build trust, Nancy spent time in the classroom modeling instructional strategies. She used this time as an opportunity to help the novice improve her skills and, equally as important, to build trust with the novice.
I just used the opportunities to build rapport with her. My "in" was really that she got a new student that wasn’t in her normal profile and that she was confident with. And luckily it was in my confident profile. So I did a lot of modeling. It gave me my "in". (Interview 6)

Spending time in the mentees’ classrooms to understand students’ needs and identify problems of practice was essential for Nancy to build trust. She felt it was important novices knew they could seek her support whenever they needed it. Aware some novices did not ask for help as readily as others, Nancy monitored and prioritized her support to ensure all novices’ needs were met.

I prioritize the level of involvement I’ve had with the teacher. So, if a teacher who doesn’t ask for help a lot comes to me and asks for help, I prioritize them so that they know they can always ask for help. (Interview 7)

Nancy provided an example of a novice who did not regularly seek her support. Having a difficult time connecting with the novice at first, Nancy described how she approached building trust.

I would say I have one example of a mentee that was just very professional, but it was hard for her to open up. Like we didn’t get anywhere whether that’s because she didn’t trust me or didn’t know what mentorship was all about. I tried to relate to her personally a lot more and have those personal conversations. I started to reach out more individually, outside of mentorship times to check in. A lot of validation when she did open up to me. I was in her classroom, and I noticed certain things that then we had to talk about it and to see how she was feeling.

She’s like, ‘Oh, you know about that kind of thing?’ Or Oh, I thought I was the only one feeling that way or sensing that kind of thing.’ So I worked really, really hard on my questioning strategies with her, connecting to her on a personal level. I would say, ‘This doesn’t leave this room’ or ‘These are things you can tell me. I always want you to feel you can tell me things.’

So it took longer to get her to open up in general. I just kept trying to pry my way in and finding those openings. (Interview 5)

In this instance, Nancy described various strategies she utilized with the novice. Nancy was persistent in finding a way to connect.
While Nancy’s persistence in connecting with mentees helped gain their trust, another factor also impacted this ability. Nancy realized that even though she may have ideas and solutions, she needed to be open to those of her mentees as well. Nancy explained how she approached differences in their ideas.

You can’t be judgmental. You have to always assume the positive intent and put your pride away. Like we all have different strategies and strengths. And just because you do it that way and I do it this way does not mean mine is right and your way is wrong or vice versa. So they [mentors] definitely have to be open to all different strategies and personalities and styles. (Interview 5)

Building mentee’s trust was vital for establishing relationships. Whether Nancy was connecting with novices on a personal level, being present in their classrooms, or finding ways to develop an in with her mentees, Nancy wanted them to know she was dependable and trustworthy.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 described Nancy’s perceptions of her mentoring knowledge and skills and the way she utilized them during her journey as a mentor. Data analysis of four semi-structured interviews, four audio recorded mentor-novice teacher mentoring sessions, and mentor journal entries produced two major themes that were described. Chapter 5 presents Isabelle’s mentoring journey, including her perceptions of knowledge and skills she utilized.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: ISABELLE’S JOURNEY AS A MENTOR

While Chapter 4 focused on Nancy’s mentoring path, this chapter chronicles Isabelle’s journey as a mentor. First, a description of Isabelle’s background is provided, including her previous experience as a teacher, her perception of a mentor’s role, and how she utilized her relationship with Nancy to build her mentoring skills. Next, findings for the first theme, guiding novices’ thinking, are presented, including a discussion of two subthemes: providing feedback and asking questions. Then findings for the second theme, providing emotional support, are presented.

Background

Isabelle’s long blonde hair framed her face, and glasses she wore made her seem older than someone in her mid-twenties. Seamlessly paired were her personality and manner in which she spoke. She was welcoming, energetic, and conveyed compassion for all who crossed her path. Her enthusiasm and motivation for becoming a full-time mentor and instructional coach were palpable and arose from her own experience as a novice teacher. “Honestly, I just really wanted to give back to what I was given at my time at Voyager, specifically in my first year… I just want to be able to do that in return for other teachers” (Interview 1). The 2019-2020 school year, the time this study took place, was Isabelle’s first year as a mentor.
After earning her Bachelor’s in Special Education, Isabelle began her career as an educator at Voyager School, teaching students with autism, ages 18 to 21, in a transition classroom. She had taught in that role for three years. As she entered her fourth year of teaching, Isabelle wanted a new challenge and switched to teaching fourth through seventh grade students.

Switching grade levels proved to be valuable for Isabelle as a teacher and as a mentor:

I feel like the best career move I made before coming into this role was when I went from being a transition teacher into an elementary teacher. Because I loved transition and I really enjoyed all the knowledge I got from that… I was missing a lot of other skills, though, that I didn’t realize I was missing until I went down into [an] elementary [classroom]. (Interview 1)

While Isabelle admitted there were teaching skills she lacked, she recognized an opportunity to teach at different grade levels helped prepare her for her mentoring role:

I do think a mentor needs to be able to know all of the things like academics, to functional, to life skills, to job readiness, to post 22 life. Like that post 22 life is always your end goal. No matter if you’re in primary or if you’re in transition, I feel like we should always be working to it if we want them to be successful when they exit. So, you need a good amount of knowledge to be successful. (Interview 1)

Isabelle drew on her prior experiences and knowledge from teaching both elementary-aged and transition-aged students to provide support to her novices, who had varied backgrounds and levels of teaching experience. She spent time building relationships and identifying needs of the five novice special education teachers (April, Kurt, Maria, Monica, and Thomas) she was assigned to support. Two novice teachers, April and Monica, had more than five years each of teaching experience but were new to Voyager. Thomas was going into his third year as a teacher but second year at Voyager. Maria was brand new to being an in-service practitioner but had previous experience as a paraprofessional. The last novice teacher, Kurt, had an emergency provisional license and was enrolled in a special education alternative certification program at a local university.
While Isabelle had a cache of knowledge and experience and an advanced degree in special education, she also understood she had much to learn about being a mentor. “This is my first year in it [being a mentor]. And I am learning … using this year as like a sponge, like [I] want to get all the information. I want to just know how to do all of the things” (Interview 2). To compensate for her inexperience, Isabelle counted on Nancy, another mentor and instructional coach at Voyager with three years of experience in those roles, for support. Nancy provided feedback and suggested mentoring strategies, which Isabelle came to appreciate and trust to help strengthen her knowledge and skills. She found her collaboration with Nancy to be beneficial and noted, “I feel like I have a lot of quality time with Nancy to be able to process through and ask questions and get insight. So that’s nice. So, if I’m stuck [on a problem], I won’t be stuck for long” (Interview 1).

Isabelle offered an example of a time she utilized her relationship with Nancy to acquire feedback. She explained, Thomas, one of her mentees, needed help creating a writing rubric, something Isabelle did not have much experience in. Therefore, she sought feedback from Nancy. Isabelle described how she used the support Nancy provided:

So, what Thomas and I did is we kind of wrote out some bones [of the rubric]. Then, he worked on it a little bit and sent it to me. I looked at it a little bit more. I showed it to Nancy to see if the layout made sense to her. She suggested maybe adding the definitions part to it. (Interview 2)

Collaborating with Nancy provided an opportunity for Isabelle to strengthen her knowledge. Isabelle was willing to be vulnerable when seeking Nancy’s opinion because she knew open and honest feedback would help her improve her mentoring skills. Even difficult feedback would not only be beneficial but could also be empowering. Isabelle reminded herself as a new mentor she needed support Nancy could offer:
So I’m going to be really vulnerable with you [Nancy]. But I want you [Nancy] to give me all the feedback at the same time and don’t feel like any feedback is too tough for me to hear. And I think that has always been hard for me too, to be as open as I have been. I’ve been reminding myself this is my first year. This is almost like Nancy’s mentoring me. It’s OK to have all those questions because I don’t want to have to always rely on Nancy to have all the answers. (Interview 2)

Even though Isabelle was a new mentor and felt like she needed to bolster her mentoring skills, there were strategies she regularly utilized to support her novices’ needs: guiding their novices’ thinking and providing emotional support.

Themes

Data were collected from four semi-structured interviews, four audio recorded mentor-novice teacher mentoring sessions, and mentor journal entries. Two major themes were identified: guiding novices’ thinking and providing emotional support (Table 5.1).

Findings for the two themes and associated subthemes form the remainder of the chapter. Voices of Isabelle and novice teachers she mentored are woven throughout the themes and subthemes to reveal strategies used. Two novice teacher’s voices, April’s and Monica’s, are represented the most throughout the description because their exchanges with Isabelle were audio-recorded and most representative of the mentoring process. Interactions with other novices (Kurt, Maria, and Thomas) are captured only through Isabelle’s comments as their mentor-SET meetings were not audio-recorded.
Table 5.1

Major Themes with Subthemes for Isabelle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme 1: Guiding Novice’s Thinking</th>
<th># of comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Feedback</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking Questions</td>
<td>38</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Major Theme 2: Providing Emotional Support</th>
<th># of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing Emotional Support</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Theme 1: Guiding Novices’ Thinking

Isabelle contended that self-reflection, or an ability to examine and frame problems of practice to develop solutions (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), was “something that’s really important to do as a teacher” (Interview 1). Although she recognized her novice teachers needed support developing their own self-reflection skills, Isabelle explained that

I don’t think they give themselves enough time to reflect. I think me being able to probe their brains a little bit is helping [them]. I don’t think they’re doing it [self-reflecting] unless I’m the one asking questions. I’m just, you know, guiding the horse to water. (Interview 1)

Isabelle’s thoughts about what was needed for her novices to develop self-reflection mirrored strategies she used to help them build their skills. Providing feedback and asking questions, which are described in the following sections, were strategies she utilized to help them solve their problems of practice.
Providing Feedback

The first subtheme, providing feedback, entailed Isabelle using purposeful comments and/or suggestions. This subtheme, supported by a total of 162 comments (see Figure 5.1), came from interviews with Isabelle, audio recordings between Isabelle and her novice teachers during mentor-SET meetings, and Isabelle’s journal entries. Table 5.2 presents the three main reasons Isabelle provided feedback to her novices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 1: Providing Feedback</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason for Feedback</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing IEP paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with paraprofessionals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Completing IEP paperwork. The main reason Isabelle provided feedback to her novices was to help them complete IEP paperwork, including writing assessments and IEP progress reports as well as developing IEP goals (101 comments). In her mentor journal, Isabelle commented that despite novices attending professional development focused on writing assessment and IEP reports, they still lacked knowledge in this area.

All [the novices] went to the training that administration presented about report writing, however they [novices] still required a lot of help. I felt like I needed to help them with each individual step, and it also seemed like they have never even had a training, even though I know they each went. (Mentor Journal 2)
Writing reports was particularly challenging for Monica and April, often requiring them to seek Isabelle’s support. In Monica’s case, feedback often focused on various steps of quarterly IEP progress reports. In one instance, Isabelle reminded Monica how she could determine if a student made progress toward an IEP goal.

So, let’s look at his old quarterly report to make sure that it is continued progress. Where was he in the summer [with the goal]? I see he was at 54 percent accuracy. So that means that it’s continued progress. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

Isabelle gave Monica feedback on the step she should take (i.e., “look at his old quarterly report”) to determine the student’s progress toward an IEP goal.

It’s continued progress if he made an increase in percentage. Even if it’s 0.5 percent of an increase, it’s still an increase of percentage. So you’re still going to put continued progress [in the report]. So either Joshua [pseudonym] is working towards benchmark C or Joshua has achieved the overall goal. That is always your first sentence. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

Isabelle guided Monica’s thinking toward determining if the student made progress or achieved the goal without providing the actual solution. She pointed out how Monica should examine data but left the decision about the student’s progress to her.

Isabelle also utilized direct feedback with Monica when she was explaining procedures for entering students’ IEP progress into the school’s student information system. As they discussed procedures, Isabelle found one of Monica’s students had not made progress on a goal, so she focused Monica’s thinking toward approaches she could use to foster the student’s growth.

It’s Raj’s [pseudonym] personal information goal, and he has decreased progress on that one. I’d probably say next quarter to increase Raj’s accuracy with his personal information. Staff will tie in use of his AAC device as well as provide an extra visual support. You know like something else just to give him a little bit more support so he can really achieve this goal. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)
By providing options for additional support, Isabelle focused Monica’s thinking while again allowing her to make her own decision.

Sometimes Isabelle’s feedback on reports novices wrote was less direct and more collaborative. For example, after examining data she had collected, Monica concluded her student showed growth toward his goal, but she wanted Isabelle’s reassurance regarding her decision. During their mentoring conversation, Monica told Isabelle some factors she considered in reaching her conclusion. Isabelle agreed with Monica’s approach to decision-making and provided her with feedback on how she could justify her data when writing her report.

Monica: He’s sleeping or having behaviors…this is what’s happening [when I’m collecting data]. I typically see if it’s going to be a zero, then it’s going to bring everything down. So it’s pointless, at least in my opinion, because if he’s not ready to work, we already know it’s going to be zero. So, I don’t always put that [data] in. Because it’s just going to bring down the days he’s really working hard. We want to see what he can do when he is regulated.

Isabelle: That’s why there’s so few opportunities. So when you write your first sentence…then you can say the number of actual trials and the percentage. I would also put why you only have six opportunities, because he’s either sleeping or he’s dysregulated.

Monica: Yeah, because if I recorded all we did and recorded every [class] session then it would not be this number. I mean it would just be zero. So, okay, I’ll do that. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

After coming to her own conclusion about her student’s progress, Monica strengthened her IEP quarterly report with feedback from Isabelle.

In contrast, feedback Isabelle gave April tended to be direct. Isabelle felt April’s need for this kind of feedback stemmed from her lack of knowledge:

She is just always looking for clear cut answers. She has a lot of holes and knowledge gaps that I still need to work on filling…part of it feels like I have to give [her] some sort of knowledge and some sort of answer. (Interview 2)
However, Isabelle was concerned that only providing direct feedback might have an unintended impact on her future relationship with April: “I don’t know if I have set up our relationship for failure for the future. Because now she’s used to me just giving her the answer” (Interview 2). Isabelle hoped April would not become too reliant on her answers.

Despite the possibility of dependency, Isabelle felt providing feedback to April was necessary to fill in knowledge gaps and guide her thinking. During a mentor-SET meeting, Isabelle and April discussed a report being written based on results of a student’s assessment. As discussion proceeded, it became clear to Isabelle that April needed additional information (i.e., content knowledge) to understand the importance of her results prior to writing her report. The following exchange details the content knowledge feedback Isabelle shared with April:

April: I didn’t think that dressing was that important because I have a feeling [his] mom does pretty much everything.

Isabelle: If I were assessing him as a true transition student, I would still do dressing. Because those are some of those foundational independent living skills that we really focus on in transition. But at his very last three year [evaluation], whoever is doing that, I would encourage them to actually do dressing, to actually do grooming routines. Because that’s going to give those [adult] placements who are looking at Marcus [pseudonym] as a potential resident or as a potential participant, they’re going to give them a little bit more information on his level of support.

April: They [transition teachers] focus on those? (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

In this example, Isabelle provided feedback so April could understand the importance of her student developing foundational independent living skills, such as dressing, because April did not initially consider the significance of the skill.
Isabelle used direct feedback to again guide April’s thinking during the same mentor-SET meeting. April struggled to understand how to interpret and utilize Marcus’ assessment results to gauge his strengths and areas for further development.

Isabelle:  This is where I would categorize those emerging skills. If he’s not doing good at following directions, then that’s a recommendation. He needs to continue working on following directions. Right?

April:  So, should I start with his strengths?

Isabelle:  Yes, and the benefit. Like what [skills] would he benefit from working on. You don’t list them word for word, just put them into super general and broader categories. (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

Isabelle’s purposeful feedback was meant to provide clarity on Marcus’ skills and what should be included in the recommendation section of April’s report.

Isabelle:  So in your recommendation you can say based on the assessment, Marcus has clear strengths in X, Y, and Z. Then in your next section, he has emerging skills in X, Y, and Z. And then your last section, he would benefit from continuing to work on skills such as following directions.

So [the recommendations] should be like three paragraphs long. So really the recommendation shouldn’t be this long write up. It should be a summary of what you saw and the things he needs to work on so he can be successful to enter the world when he turns 22. (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

By using straightforward and purposeful feedback, Isabelle addressed April’s lack of knowledge in writing assessment reports.

Novices also seemed to need support when it came to developing IEP goals and identifying methods to collect goal data. Monica and April both sought Isabelle’s support for developing IEP goals but for different reasons. Monica seemed to grasp goals she wanted to write but sought Isabelle’s reassurance. Conversely, April needed Isabelle’s feedback for developing IEP goals to help her organize her ideas and identify the skill to focus the goal on.
Feedback given to Monica when she thought through her problems of practice and developed solutions on her own was more collaborative. Monica needed reassurance from Isabelle that her thinking was accurate and goals she developed were appropriate. For example, during a mentor-SET meeting, Monica vacillated on who implementers of a student’s goal should be. When she could not decide the best route for the goal, Isabelle asked Monica to focus her thinking:

Monica: So, now I don’t know what to do with that if [I should] add another global [IEP] goal? [I would] make it ‘staying with the group’. Or should it just be me and the social worker and have two objectives?

Isabelle: Why would you? Can I just ask a quick question? Why would you want it to be a global [IEP] goal? What is your hope with it if it’s a global goal?

Monica: Well, I thought like everybody [all IEP team members] would work on it. It wouldn’t just be me and the social worker. You know, it would still apply to everybody.

Isabelle: So, just because a goal isn’t a global goal doesn’t mean that everyone can’t work on it together. So, you don’t necessarily need to have two global goals. If you really want to, then advocate for that.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

While Isabelle provided feedback to focus Monica’s thinking, discussion remained collaborative as Isabelle left the decision about the goal up to Monica.

Similarly, when Monica was unsure of the best way to track data for the student’s IEP goal, she sought Isabelle’s reassurance, but before offering feedback, Isabelle wanted to better understand Monica’s concern. In the following exchange with Isabelle, Monica voiced her worry about how other team members would collect data in relation to the IEP goal.

Monica: Well, I thought that for everybody, it wouldn’t just be me and the social worker, but like everybody [will] work on it. Because let’s say like if the speech therapist is doing a scavenger hunt or something, that I feel like that would be still applicable. You know what I mean?
Isabelle: Everyone on the team can still be working on it, you and the social worker would be the data takers. If that kind of makes sense.

Monica: Yeah, that does make sense.

Isabelle: The other thing is you can collaborate with your behavior analyst to see if the data for it can be taken on the behavior data sheet.

Monica: It’s a good idea to ask her. Because she was going to put a sample goal from another kid that had a similar goal. So, maybe see how that’s going to look and then decide how to make this one look. That’s a good idea! (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

To guide Monica’s thinking, Isabelle utilized feedback to confirm that all IEP team members would be working on the goal and suggested Monica should collaborate with the behavior analyst. Here Isabelle’s feedback prompted Monica to reflect on a prior experience, which helped her begin to solve her current problem of practice.

When it came to supporting April with IEP goals, Isabelle’s feedback needed to be more direct because she felt April lacked knowledge and did not always understand her mistakes. Isabelle asserted there was a disconnect between IEP goals April wrote for her students and data she collected to determine their present level of performance (PLOP). Drawing April’s attention to the misalignment was necessary.

It’s just the problem is that the PLOP and the goal just don’t align. And so like…I can point out to her the PLOP is all about grammar, then all of a sudden, the goal is about punctuation. Like those are different things. So, it’s really hard to not point that out. (Interview 2)

During an instance in which Isabelle and April were developing IEP goals, April’s goal writing became imprecise due to having many unconnected goal ideas. Isabelle recounted,

So, I told April, you’re really scatterbrain. I need you to funnel [your ideas]. Like, what specifically are you targeting? Like, you have all of these ideas. They’re all over the place. I see where you’re going with it. It all makes sense. But let’s funnel it down and get to one [idea]. That’s mostly what I’m doing with her right now. Because she has good ideas. It’s just they’re literally all over the place. (Interview 2)
Isabelle felt April had valuable ideas, but intentional feedback was needed to remind April to focus her thinking about what the IEP goal needed to target. Isabelle recognized her mentees lacked knowledge about completing IEP paperwork, which included developing IEP goals and writing progress reports. Helping her novices gain knowledge and improve their skills was the main reason Isabelle provided feedback to guide their thinking.

**Planning Instruction.** Another reason Isabelle provided feedback was to help her novices plan instruction such as student interventions, resources, and lesson pacing (39 total comments).

In her mentor journal, Isabelle described some of the support she offered her novices.

We focused on lessons. Helping them with the flow of their lesson, their pacing, and differentiating was exciting for me as a mentor. I was also able to spend a lot of time in their classrooms seeing the lessons they explained they were struggling with. I did help rearrange some activities within the schedule and helped with differentiating some materials. (Journal 3)

Isabelle spent time in novices’ classrooms to identify students’ needs and provide more effective feedback on planning instruction. Not only did she observe while in the classroom, but she also interacted with students. For example, Isabelle spent time in Monica’s classroom assessing a student’s comprehension skills to help Monica determine how to implement an IEP goal.

**Isabelle:** So, I really like the idea of listening comprehension for her because I think you’re right. She’s not listening to staff. You know, she wants to just go ahead and do what she thinks the answer is. So, why not target listening comprehension?

You know that touch chat editor that the speech therapist makes that shows her the pathway to answer a question or request help? What if you adapted it? That instead of these pictures here, it was a touch chat editor like pathway. So, she had to then answer through her [AAC] device because it would force her to also look and to only pick one [answer].

**Monica:** Yeah, I like that it’s breaking it down because I think we need to take a step back. Because I’m wondering, is she just getting lost while she’s
waiting [to answer]? So, I wonder something like this where she reads one
sentence and then she has to answer it immediately versus like waiting
until the end of the story that’s a better approach. (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

Through Isabelle’s observations, she was able to understand a challenge Monica was facing
implementing a goal with her student (i.e., “She’s not listening to staff”). Isabelle then provided
feedback about an intervention to address the challenge and meet the student’s needs.

Sometimes feedback Isabelle provided after observing in Monica’s classroom centered on
a specific student intervention that would allow the student to participate more effectively in a
group lesson. During a mentor-SET meeting, Isabelle suggested an iPad application she felt
would help one of Monica’s students become more engaged in the activity.

Isabelle: Board Maker Online actually has an app that you can put on the iPad. So
you could make one of those interactive activities for her number ID and
have her do it on the iPad. It would be like how she sees the activity on the
interactive board, where she has to go up and touch the answer. Does that
make sense?

Monica: But does it look like the interactive board?

Isabelle: Yeah, this way she’s forced to pick only one answer. I was thinking
maybe she would be motivated by the sound. Because it makes the same
sound as when you do it up on the interactive board with all the students.
The app is called Student Center Board Maker.

Monica: Yeah, that’s nice. I would like to look that up. (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

While Isabelle provided feedback to Monica on a resource to better engage the student, Isabelle
allowed Monica to decide if the resource was appropriate and would be a suitable solution for the
student.

When working with April, Isabelle’s feedback on planning instruction was often similar
to other feedback she gave her – straightforward and pragmatic. During a mentor-SET meeting,
Isabelle and April discussed a budgeting math lesson April had been working on, but April was undecided about the best materials to use for her student. Isabelle suggested,

I personally love always using real materials. Because let’s make it as functional and realistic for our students as possible. So maybe as he’s getting used to looking at a real ad, is there some way that you can adapt it, so the activity is a little bit more achievable. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

Isabelle’s suggestion to use real materials provided straightforward feedback with a rationale for this type of material (i.e., functional, and realistic).

However, there were times when April needed reassurance while planning instruction, so Isabelle’s feedback was more collaborative. For example, April and Isabelle were discussing a different whole class math lesson when April recognized her thinking about the lesson was unfocused.

April: I’m all over the place. So, I’m just trying to think where to go [with the lesson]. But like you said. I need to pick one thing and stick to it.

Isabelle: Honestly, April, from the beginning of the year to now, I feel like you have funneled a lot of the focal points in your lessons. Before your lessons were all over the place. So it was hard sometimes for the students to figure out what exactly you were targeting. Now I feel like your lessons are super streamlined. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

Isabelle’s feedback was intended to reassure April that her lessons were improving but seeing an opportunity to continue to guide April’s thinking further, Isabelle offered her a suggestion to enhance her lesson. Isabelle commented,

There’s a very clear start and end. There’s a fairly smooth method to how you’re implementing your lesson with your students. I just still feel like in your brain you want [to include] so many things [in your lessons]. I don’t feel like that’s awful. You just have really high expectations and goals for your students. So maybe your next step could be to develop a sequence [in your lesson] to include all those things you want them to do. And, make it make sense to get to the goal you want with them. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)
Isabelle chose a more collaborative approach when she wanted April to expand her thinking about a lesson plan. An observation scheduled by Isabelle was meant for April to see another teacher teaching with the same curriculum she used. To focus April’s thinking, Isabelle commented on how the other teacher’s students were different than April’s.

I really like the way that you structure your lessons. I like all the things that you hit on with them. I think it’s all really important things. But I’d be curious to see how you also feel after seeing somebody else teach the same content essentially. Jeff’s [pseudonym] students are different than yours a little bit. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

Prior to providing feedback about lesson structure, resources, and specific student interventions, Isabelle gathered additional information about her novices’ problems of practice by observing in their classrooms, which helped her when making suggestions and providing feedback.

Working with paraprofessionals. The last reason Isabelle provided feedback was to help her novices supervise their paraprofessionals more effectively because many of them were new to the role. There were 22 total comments about working with paraprofessionals in the qualitative data. For example, Isabelle commented in her mentor journal: “A lot of the teachers are new to supervising this year and… are starting to see some issues they need to work on with their staff” (Journal 4). She later wrote, “My three mentees who are in their first year of teaching are now seeing a lot of shaping that their teams need (e.g., PAs having side conversations, talking about students in front of students, pushing away from a 1:1 model)” (Journal 5).

While mentees may have recognized issues they were having with their paraprofessionals, Isabelle felt her novices did not want to challenge their staff and avoided bringing attention to concerns. However, Isabelle knew it was necessary for novices to address issues because it was their responsibility to advocate for their students. Using direct feedback, Isabelle reminded novices of the importance.
A couple of my mentees have said that’s just not my personality, and I don’t want to step on toes. And I’m like, I get that. But also, you’re the advocate for the students. So, you need to step in and be their voice and tell the staff to just stop talking about the students in front of them. (Interview 3)

Even though Isabelle provided feedback to help her novices address difficult situations, she felt they continued to struggle with having challenging conversations.

The novices are having difficulty finding the time, and maybe confidence, to have some more challenging conversations with their staff. Teachers are starting to complete mid-years [evaluations] and noticing more things their PAs need shaping, but then they are not always following through with the conversation. I can’t tell if sometimes it is an information gap or a capacity gap as to why they are not having the conversation. (Journal 6)

Regardless of Isabelle’s uncertainty about why her novices struggled, she continued to help them understand how to effectively approach conversations.

The first route I go to is I ask them [mentees] where their rapport is with their staff. Because I feel like if you have a strong rapport, you can have those more challenging conversations. But if you don’t have that strong rapport staff isn’t necessarily going to respect when you bring up those more intricate things. (Interview 3)

Given novice teachers lacked supervisory skills, Isabelle felt thinking through each step of the process (e.g., how each individual preferred feedback) helped them address how to have difficult conversations.

So, they have the rapport, great! Let’s move on to the next step. I usually say are they [the paraprofessional] somebody who likes feedback in the moment or are they somebody who likes feedback privately? And see if they [the mentees] could assess that with their staff. (Interview 3)

Her goal was to help novices reflect on relationships they had established with their paraprofessionals. Knowing this, Isabelle used a gradual approach with her feedback, which slowly guided her novices’ thinking.

I kind of do a step by step until we get to how to form that conversation. And if they’re truly like, I don’t even know, then maybe I’ll give them some sentence starters or tell
them keep it very situation specific. And try to keep that hearsay out of it. It should be true, only the things you have observed. (Interview 3)

By drawing novices’ attention to important aspects of the conversation, such as the novice-paraprofessional relationship or how a paraprofessional liked to receive feedback, Isabelle guided their thinking without providing exact answers for initiating the conversations. Guidance she provided allowed novices to make their own decisions about how best to have the conversations.

In summary, providing feedback to novices was the main strategy Isabelle utilized to guide thinking when assisting with problems of practice. Completing IEP paperwork, planning instruction, and working with paraprofessionals were the areas in which Isabelle utilized feedback most frequently. But to guide novices’ thinking further, she also asked questions about their problems of practice.

**Asking Questions**

The second subtheme, asking questions, which is supported by 38 comments (see Figure 5.1), stemmed from Isabelle asking questions to draw novices’ attention to perspectives they had not considered or to gain additional information about their problems of practice. Isabelle felt it was important not to give the novices answers to solve their problems, but instead she wanted novices to solve them on their own. By using questions, Isabelle guided their thinking toward solutions.

I needed to remind myself to see if they [novices] could talk themselves through their problem with me just like listening and asking the occasional question. Or, how could I help them figure out what to do without pushing my own personal beliefs on how they should fix something. (Interview 4)
Three main reasons Isabelle asked questions to help them solve their problems arose from the data (see Table 5.3). Thirty-eight comments that support this subtheme came from interviews with Isabelle and audio recordings between Isabelle and her novice teachers during mentor-SET meetings.

Table 5.3

Reasons Isabelle Asked Novices Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 2: Asking Questions</th>
<th># of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying resources</td>
<td>16 comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing IEP paperwork</td>
<td>14 comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning instruction</td>
<td>8 comments</td>
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**Identifying Resources.** Asking questions helped Isabelle gain information while guiding a novice’s thinking about a resource. During one instance, Isabelle helped Monica identify a resource she could use during reading instruction with a student who had a newly implemented behavior plan. The plan required the student to only work for short periods of time before taking a break, which concerned Monica as she looked for appropriate reading resources. Isabelle asked Monica what she thought was appropriate for the student.

Isabelle: How does he do with adapted books? Like the kind with matching activities, just in book format.

Monica: But the time that we have [for him to work] is like only three minutes right now.

Isabelle: So, you feel like that’s still a little too high [complex for him]?
Monica: We are trying this sensory/motivation system where we set a timer for a total of three minutes. That’s his work time. And that’s why we had to modify everything. That’s where a file folder [activity] saves the day. One simple activity he can get through.

You know I have some data where he did sit through reading comprehension. But now with the new system we’re struggling. Because after three minutes then he’s going to go get sensory for three minutes. And then we have to start over with the reading. (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

Isabelle’s questions prompted Monica to consider what resources might be appropriate given the limited amount of time he has to work. As Monica continued to reflect on Isabelle’s questions, she realized she could adapt the resource she was already using, thus solving her own problem of practice.

Monica: You know, maybe I can look at the stories [I’m already using] and cut them in half so that they fit into his new system. That way he’s not going to forget what he just read. So I can adapt what I already have and see if that works. Like maybe one page or two that he can carry around because he is still going to be moving [when he is doing his work].

Isabelle: Yes! Yes! (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

Isabelle also used questioning when she wanted the mentee to think more strategically about a resource already being used. For example, when discussing appropriateness of a math curriculum April believed might be too easy for her students, Isabelle asked questions to guide April’s thinking about the students’ math skill levels in relation to the curriculum.

April: I liked how the Explore Math had the big and small packages [unit] with it. I mean it was all real world too. But I didn’t know if it was too easy for them [the students]?

Isabelle: Have you looked at the students’ scores recently in IXL [online math curriculum] and compared it to this [Explore Math] curriculum to see how they are doing on that? Are they [the scores] all about the same? Or are they [the scores] kind of all over the board?

April: I think they’re comparable to each other. But I guess the topic we are on right now is subtracting with regrouping. And doing the four-digit number was really hard with the zeros. So, then I scaled it back, and I found a
math aid worksheet. I’m just trying to figure out what is the next unit. Like budgeting?

Isabelle: That’s what chapter three looks like for Explore Math. Looks like budgeting and grocery store math. I feel like you’re right. I feel like you kind of have to adapt it.

April: OK, you do?

Isabelle: I’m sure you could find a way to make it a little bit more challenging for them. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

As April reflected on Isabelle’s questions, she reviewed students’ skill levels and then determined how she would approach her next math lesson.

April: Let me pull this up. So, Chris [pseudonym] would be like second grade and a half. Let’s see Kevin [pseudonym], he’s on the same level. Yeah, Chris and Kevin are very close. Andy [pseudonym] is at fourth grade.

Isabelle: So maybe aim for third grade materials and then adapt it to make it harder for Andy.

April: I was thinking maybe next week I’ll do subtracting four-digit numbers, because this week we did three digits. And then start incorporating the budgeting too. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

By utilizing questions to guide April’s thinking, Isabelle helped April arrive at her own solution. With questions, she was able to gather information about students’ skill levels or draw novices’ attention to data that should be considered when making resource decisions. Similarly, Isabelle found asking novices questions when completing IEP paperwork guided their thinking about assessment data or the focus of an IEP goal.

Completing IEP paperwork. Completing IEP paperwork (e.g., writing IEP goals) seemed to be a skill for which the novices also needed Isabelle’s support. She used questions to guide their thinking when completing IEP paperwork in that the novice needed to report on the overall purpose for a student focusing on specific skills. For example, Isabelle and April discussed IEP goals for a student who would soon turn 22, which marked the end of his special education
services. She wanted to draw April’s attention to information she should be considering for IEP goal development (i.e., who the individual is as a student coupled with his assessment results).

Isabelle: And you’re going to think of who Marcus [pseudonym] is as a student, as well as what information you got from this assessment. What are some key things he now needs to focus in on to be successful for the rest of this year until he turns 22?

April: Well, I find it interesting because I see there’s some parallels with the VB-MAPP [assessment]. I think it was in this section…the WH [comprehension] questions. That’s a goal I want him to have. I thought that would be good. That goal is exactly like this [VB-MAPP] assessment. That’s what I was going to target anyway!

Isabelle: Exactly! So in your recommendation [section] you can say, based on the assessment Marcus has clear strengths and say what he mastered in general categories. So, you don’t list everything, like wiping the table, putting things away, just call it cleaning. Then the next sentence is he has emerging skills and put them in general categories too.

April: So this is basically where he is emerging, and this is where I’m putting the mastered skills? (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

Through Isabelle’s questions, April began to reflect on Marcus’ assessment results, which helped her identify the skills he was lacking and pinpoint the skills she thought might be necessary for him.

Isabelle: Then from there it could be helpful for you to write, Marcus would benefit from a WH question goal or this type of goal or that type of goal.

April: And I can kind of just very quickly, briefly state the goals that I’m going to do like the 1 to 1 correspondence goal and the WH question goal.

Isabelle: So, it’s really your recommendation and you using your teacher brain and your best judgement on who Marcus will be when he turns 22. These are the things he needs to work on so he can be successful when he enters the post-22 world. (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

Using questions to focus a novice’s thinking on a student’s skills was also utilized when Isabelle helped with writing IEP progress reports. For instance, if a student had not made
progress on an IEP goal, Isabelle wanted the novice to consider what barriers might be preventing the student’s achievement. While helping Monica with IEP quarterly progress reports, Isabelle described the importance of having a plan for addressing when a student had not made expected goal progress. Isabelle commented to Monica,

Yes, the student is a little below the [goal] benchmark. But you’re going to do [a variety of different things] and then it’s really going to get him back to where you want him to be. Or even maybe ahead of the benchmark. So, has he achieved the goal yet? No, but he’s on his way there. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

Isabelle reassured Monica that even if her student was not making expected progress on his IEP goals, the lack of achievement could be addressed. Isabelle used questions to guide Monica’s thinking about factors that could be preventing the student’s success.

Hopefully when you do his quarterly report, you’ll see a majority of them [IEP goals] are achieved or at least really close to being achieved right now. If they’re not, then they’re not. And you speak to [in the report] what you are seeing in class that could possibly hinder his progress of reaching the goals. Was it that you’re seeing more behaviors? More refusal? Was it that something else changed? (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

Isabelle’s questions were meant to help Monica understand her student’s lack of progress and potential barriers that needed to be addressed as she wrote her student’s IEP progress report. As Monica did not provide answers to the questions, Isabelle reminded her, “Have something you can speak to that could a hypothesize as to why [he isn’t progressing]” (Mentor-SET Meeting 1).

Similarly, when a novice needed help understanding how to interpret data collected on a student’s IEP goal, Isabelle used questions to guide the novice’s thinking. Isabelle and Monica’s discussion about a student’s calming routine goal provided examples of questions Isabelle used to focus Monica’s thinking.

Isabelle: Raj [pseudonym] had a social work classroom co-treat goal. Which was really his calming routine. So have you seen any time when Raj was super upset and you needed to tell him to go lay down or calm down?
Isabelle: So during those times, can you remember if you needed to do physical management? Or was he able to calm down as soon as he [sat down] on a beanbag?

Monica: Oh no! Never physical management with Raj.

To guide Monica’s thinking about Raj utilizing the calming routine, Isabelle asked her questions about Raj’s behavior. Isabelle’s questions were meant to help Monica define when Raj was successful or unsuccessful using his calming routine (i.e., sitting on a beanbag or the need for physical management). To further define Monica’s understanding and prompt her reflection on Raj’s progress, Isabelle asked,

Isabelle: And then when he made it to the bean bag, was he able to quickly calm down, collect himself, and come back?

Monica: He only had, that I remember, it was like two times [he came to the beanbag and calmed down]. (Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

By asking questions, Isabelle clarified Monica’s assessment of Raj’s behavior, which helped Monica consider whether he was making progress on his IEP goal. Questions were also used for clarification when Isabelle was supporting novices with planning instruction.

Planning instruction. Planning instruction (e.g., specific student interventions, classroom set-up) was the third reason Isabelle asked questions to guide novices’ thinking (8 total comments). Not wanting to directly provide an answer, Isabelle used questioning to help identify solutions requiring development of specific student interventions. For example, Isabelle helped April determine a possible intervention for her student Marcus who was experiencing some behavior challenges.

Isabelle: I was trying to figure out what is going on with him.

April: His mom said it’s this time of year when he tends to [have challenges].
Isabelle: Is he cyclical then? And so just like every winter this happens?

April: She just said it was hard for him.

Isabelle: Do you have a calming routine for Marcus right now?

By asking questions about Marcus’ behavior challenges, Isabelle guided April’s thinking toward factors she should consider when developing an intervention (e.g., frequency of behavior, type of intervention). While April said an intervention was already being developed for Marcus, Isabelle’s questions allowed April to disclose how she was feeling about the challenging situation.

April: It’s in the works. The behavior analyst is working on it. We’ve had so many team meetings really trying to process all of this stuff. You know, it’s just, I don’t want to be afraid of my student. He’s a bit scary.

Isabelle: He is a big guy.

April: It’s just wearing on my mind.

Isabelle acknowledged April’s apprehension, but she used another question to guide April’s thinking back toward finding a potential solution.

Isabelle: I mean it sounds like all of the wheels are turning right now and everything that can be getting done is getting done. But, I’ll be curious to see what is decided at the crisis management meeting today. What are the creative solutions you can come up with? (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

Initially Isabelle utilized questions to gain information about April’s problem, but she recognized April’s thinking was not heading toward a solution. Finding it necessary to refocus the discussion, Isabelle asked April about a meeting being held to discuss Marcus’ challenging behavior.

Guiding novices’ thinking when planning instruction also included asking questions to help them prepare their classroom environments. During a mentor-SET meeting, Isabelle and
April discussed how to best utilize the different areas in the classroom to maximize students’ learning. Isabelle used questions to gather information about the areas April wanted to include in her classroom layout.

April: I really want to move my desk. So, I don’t know if that’s something you can help me with. I mean, I’m open to any suggestions. I just need to make better use of the room.

Isabelle: What are you envisioning that you want in your classroom?

April: I’d like to move my desk. I don’t think it has to be in the front. I don’t see why that’s necessary. I [also] want to have a vocational area.

Isabelle: So, you want a vocational, independent work area?

April: I don’t know if I should put the cabinet by the hallway windows. I just don’t like where that is set up back there now.

Isabelle: What other areas do you want in your room?

April: Well, I want different sections for GDI [small group work]. The one by the window that’s just so distracting for the students. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)

Noting April’s answers, Isabelle then summarized various learning areas. She further guided April’s thinking by asking her to reflect on what had already been discussed regarding the classroom layout.

Isabelle: So far, I was just taking notes. You want to move your desk. You want to define a vocational area. Maybe put the cabinets in front of the windows to the hallway. Define GDI [small group work] stations because the one by the hallway windows is distracting and then all the bookcases and the other things on the front are distracting. Anything else that you’re imagining in your perfect room looking like?

April: Having a little relaxation corner like I do now. I still want to have that. I like how the desks are…they really work out well. These are all the major things. I just need to put visuals everywhere. That’s what I really want to try to get done. (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)
Isabelle’s use of questions allowed April to decide what was important and to begin to develop a reorganization plan.

Whether novices needed support identifying resources, completing IEP paperwork, or planning instruction, Isabelle was there to assist. However, she felt it was important for novices to solve their own problems. Asking questions allowed Isabelle to gain information and/or help the novice understand a different perspective that guided their thinking toward a solution.

**Theme 2: Emotional Support**

Emotional support provided by a mentor through building caring relationships and taking an interest in novices’ challenges helps develop novices’ confidence, resilience, and self-reliance (Billingsley et al., 2004). Providing emotional support, supported by 53 comments (see Figure 5.1), arose as the second theme through data analysis of interviews with Isabelle, audio recordings between Isabelle and her novice teachers during mentor-SET meetings, and Isabelle’s journal entries.

Isabelle recognized it was necessary for her to provide emotional support as her mentees had difficult jobs, and she also knew her approach to providing emotional support had to align to the novices’ individual needs.

I think a lot of it just has to do with how you listen and how you respond in the moment. I also think you have to be like a chameleon because certain people need you to respond certain ways to things in order to build that trust. (Interview 1)

Although novices’ needs often changed quickly, Isabelle found adapting to them was an energizing component of mentoring and remaining flexible helped her build trust.

I feel like I just never know what I’m going to walk in to; it’s kind of the excitement piece of being a mentor. Yeah, I think you just have to always be able to go with the flow and kind of be flexible at all points of time. (Interview 3)
Part of building novices’ trust often required Isabelle to listen to their frustrations. She noted in her mentor journal:

I was that safe place they could vent/express their problems. Some of my mentees became really emotional when they were talking about their staffing issues or how they are struggling writing some IEP goals. I feel like this was a good month for our relationship building. (Journal 4)

To create a safe environment in which novices felt comfortable venting frustrations, Isabelle felt the foundation of caring relationships was built on her mentees being open and honest with her.

“You need to be building those relationships and the foundation to get your mentees to really open up and be honest with you. I feel pretty confident just building that foundation” (Interview 4). For example, during a mentor-SET meeting, April voiced her concerns about one of her paraprofessionals.

April: Then the other thing I wanted to talk to you about is just, I’m starting to see some things [in my classroom] that I really want to tweak now that I’ve been here a couple of months. I think my Senior PA [paraprofessional] is not as good as I thought she was.

Isabelle: So, tell me more

April: I’m not happy with how she plans CBI [community-based instruction]. I think they’re just the same ones every single month without much planning. (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

For Isabelle, being open and honest was not only demonstrated in her words but also through her actions. For instance, Isabelle described a time she provided emotional support when one of Monica’s students was having some behavioral challenges she took personally.

And at one point, I just like reached my hand across the table and I put my hand on her arm and I said, you’re a good teacher. Don’t doubt yourself. You are a good teacher. You’re doing everything you can. You’re taking all the steps. It’s hard to see your students get injured, but you are doing what you need to do. And then I think like a weight lifted off her shoulders. I think she needed to hear you’re fine. Like you’re doing great. You’re a good teacher. (Interview 2)
Isabelle’s emotional support validated for Monica that she was addressing her student’s challenges in the best manner possible. In another example of Isabelle using emotional support to provide validation, she reminded Monica to take a moment to reflect on challenges she was working on addressing.

Isabelle: What is something you are really proud of from this week?

Monica: I feel like on Wednesday I had a really good meeting with the behavior analyst.

Isabelle: One of the last times we talked about your relationship [with her] you were saying that you’re feeling like you aren’t really connecting. Do you feel like that’s improved?

Monica: In that sense, I still feel like I’m noticing some inconsistencies about the approaches we use with the kids. It’s just a matter of finding a way so that everything [with the students] gets addressed. I feel like every time I bring something up, then it doesn’t get communicated.

Isabelle: You just feel like no one’s on the same page about everything.

(Mentor-SET Meeting 1)

Sometimes novices sought Isabelle’s validation as a means for approval. When problems arose, novices did not always have confidence to realize they had a correct answer or viable solution to a problem. Isabelle commented, “So they have already figured out things for themselves. They just need me, as like their cheerleader, to tell them you’re doing it right. Good job! Almost like a green light. That’s what they need” (Interview 4). Monica and Isabelle’s exchange provides an example that Monica understood the IEP schedule and significant amount of work she needed to complete.

Monica: It was just I was looking at the IEP schedule yesterday and I saw everyday there was something due. I mean, like, I know I completed the tasks [IEP paperwork], but I was nervous because I thought [I missed something]. I was like, should I copy these reports into Infinite Campus or not? You know, those kinds of questions were like haunting me.
Isabelle: Especially since you have...let me see, six students’ IEPs open right now.

Monica: I was trying to look for all of the meeting dates. I’m not even sure I know them, so I asked about them.

Isabelle: You have six open right now. That’s a lot! (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)

In this example, Monica already had answers to her own questions and Isabelle’s emotional support provided reassurance and validation. However, when Isabelle did not immediately provide a solution but recognized the need for emotional support, she said, “Definitely I am still really validating their feelings. I feel like when they have complained to me, I’m like, that is frustrating. I totally hear you. I would be frustrated if I was in your shoes too” (Interview 1). An example of Isabelle validating April’s frustration can be seen in an exchange during a mentor-SET meeting.

Isabelle: Do you want to talk about your day yesterday? You could tell on a lot of your faces [in the classroom] that it was not a great day?

April: We’re having a horrible time with Liam [pseudonym]. It’s been awful. And I don’t have staff to keep babysitting him. And it’s affecting my teaching with the kids that are sitting there patiently waiting for me. We’re trying to run around like crazy. I don’t feel like I’m getting the support I need. I’ve been very vocal about things, you know, of course in a kind way.

Isabelle: What are some of the things he’s been doing? (Mentor-SET Meeting 2)

Isabelle’s support validated April’s frustration with her student, but she wanted April to find the solution to her problem by guiding her thinking while still providing emotional support.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 described Isabelle’s perceptions of her mentoring knowledge and skills and the way she utilized them during her journey as a first-year mentor. Data analysis of four semi-
structured interviews, four audio recorded mentor-novice teacher mentoring sessions, and mentor journal entries produced two major themes. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings identified in Chapters 4 and 5 as well as implications for the field.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine knowledge and skills mentors used to address needs of novice special education teachers (SETs) in an educative mentoring relationship. This chapter begins with a discussion of major findings that answer the following research questions: 1) What do mentors perceive as the knowledge and skills needed when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs and 2) In what ways does a mentor utilize knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring to novice SETs. Findings are presented in conjunction with prior research as well as the theoretical framework: community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978), and reflective practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Since findings for the two research questions parallel each other, they will be provided thematically. Finally, a description of limitations of this study, recommendations for mentors of novice SETs, and suggestions for future research are presented.

Discussion of Major Findings

This study focused on Nancy’s and Isabelle’s perceptions of knowledge and skills required to provide educative mentoring to novice SETs and how the mentors utilized their knowledge and skills. Regarding mentoring practice, a difference existed between Nancy’s and Isabelle’s adeptness to support their novice teachers. Nancy was a veteran teacher who had
previous experience as a mentor. Her philosophy for supporting novices was to use and adapt her mentoring strategies so novices would arrive at a solution to a problem of practice on their own. Self-reflection was a necessary skill for Nancy which she promoted among her novices and used within her own mentoring practice. Establishing trust and building relationships with novices was crucial to Nancy’s mentoring practice and she went to great lengths to ensure strong foundations. Nancy’s practice embodied that of an educative mentor.

On the other hand, Isabelle was a brand-new mentor with few years of teaching experience. While she understood the importance of using mentoring strategies to guide novices to solutions, her inexperience as a mentor prevented her from utilizing them consistently. Isabelle often felt pressured to provide answers instead of guiding novices to solutions. She believed as a mentor she should have all the answers to novices’ problems. She often relied on Nancy for development of her mentoring practice. Isabelle seemed to be in uncharted waters as a mentor much like the novices she mentored. Support she provided was often about giving novices answers or solutions instead of scaffolding and guiding. While there were glimmers of Isabelle being an educative mentor, she was not experienced enough to provide this type of mentoring yet.

Despite the differences in Nancy and Isabelle’s mentoring practice major findings were identified in this study which occurred for both mentors. Major findings include

1. Mentors should foster the development of self-reflection skills for novice SETs to solve their own problems of practice.

2. Mentors’ content knowledge should include identifying instructional strategies and completing IEP paperwork.
3. Establishment of mentoring relationships requires mentors to gain novices’ trust and provide them with emotional support.

In the following sections, three major findings are discussed in connection to prior research and the theoretical framework.

**Finding #1: Mentors Should Foster the Development of Self-Reflection Skills**

The most significant finding to emerge from this study was that mentors should foster development of novice SETs’ self-reflection skills to help them solve their own problems of practice. Nancy and Isabelle both felt that as mentors, it was their role to promote the development of these skills. They agreed novices needed to spend more time examining their problems of practice to identify viable solutions, which parallels results of Jones and Straker’s (2006) study in which mentors were surveyed about the professional knowledge needed and utilized when working with novice teachers. One hundred percent of mentors in Jones and Straker’s study at elementary and secondary levels reported encouraging novices’ self-reflection was necessary.

As the role of the educative mentor is to help novices reflect on alternative strategies to solve problems and identify implications for their practice (Upson Bradbury, 2010), by probing novices’ thinking, Nancy and Isabelle helped novices identify and clarify solutions. Similarly, Schwille (2008) found mentors drew from a range of strategies when they shaped growth opportunities for their novices. Beyond the mentoring discussions that helped novices solve problems, Nancy and Isabelle presented opportunities for novices to reflect on a situation and then strategically guided novices’ thinking to potential solutions. Two educative mentor strategies utilized by Nancy and Isabelle included providing feedback (Feiman-Nemser, 2001;
McDonald & Flint, 2011; Schwille, 2008; Upson Bradbury, 2010) and asking questions (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McDonald & Flint, 2011).

For Nancy and Isabelle providing feedback meant using purposeful comments and suggestions to guide novices’ thinking to frame and solve problems of practice. For example, Nancy and Charlotte discussed a math resource for teaching addition during which Nancy offered a suggestion (“maybe go with manipulatives”). During the discussion, Charlotte added she had a resource she wanted Nancy’s opinion on. Scaffolding her feedback, Nancy guided Charlotte toward a potential solution while also increasing Charlotte’s reflection skills. Similarly, Isabelle used feedback when Monica was unsure of the best manner to track data for a student’s IEP goal. Already having identified potential solutions, Monica further developed her conclusion using Isabelle’s feedback.

Similar to providing feedback, Nancy and Isabelle asked novices questions to guide their thinking and promote self-reflection. For Nancy and Isabelle, the purpose of asking questions was twofold and aligned with Schwille (2008): a) to gather information prior to providing feedback to the novice and b) to offer suggestions in an indirect manner. Often when discussing problems of practice with novices, Nancy and Isabelle required additional information to know how to best guide novices toward solutions. Mentors gained the information by asking questions while also understanding where the novice may have a knowledge gap. For instance, Nancy described co-planning a lesson with Rita after observing in her classroom. Nancy’s goal was for Rita to identify what she thought was, or was not, effective in the lesson. Nancy felt that asking questions (“Did you try something new?” and “What would you tweak?”) allowed her to provide support without directly offering Rita solutions. Likewise, Isabelle utilized questions with Monica to help her determine how to implement an IEP goal after observing the student in the
classroom. Questions, such as “Why not target listening comprehension?” and “What if you adapted it?” were meant to guide Monica’s thinking toward a solution.

While providing feedback and asking questions are effective educative mentoring strategies (McDonald & Flint, 2011), the success of the strategies can depend on the mentor. For Nancy, this meant implementing her strategies with fidelity so the novices could solve their problems of practice. In contrast, Isabelle focused more on finding answers to novices’ problems, even if that meant abandoning her mentoring strategy to help them find a solution. For example, Isabelle asked April questions to guide her thinking when she struggled to adapt a math lesson that would meet all her students’ needs. Instead of Isabelle adjusting her mentoring strategy when April could not arrive at a solution, she provided the answer (“aim for some third-grade material and then adapt it”). Schwille (2008) reminds us that educative mentoring is a practice that must be learned. Isabelle’s inexperience as a mentor may have contributed to her inconsistency when providing feedback and asking questions to guide novices’ thinking.

Nancy and Isabelle felt strongly their novices should make their own decisions on problems of practice, although their mentor approaches differed. Isabelle was sometimes direct through offering advice. For example, when Isabelle felt April was not identifying assessment results on her own for a student who would soon turn 22 (beyond the age of special education services), she interpreted them for her. Isabelle told April, “If I were assessing him as a true transition student, I would still do dressing” (Mentor-SET Meeting 2). She wanted April to understand the importance of the student practicing dressing skills since he soon would no longer be attending school. However, when Isabelle and Monica examined data on a student’s progress toward an IEP goal, Isabelle was more collaborative in her approach. She listened to how Monica interpreted the student’s progress and then asked questions to guide her thinking. Once
Monica arrived at a solution, Isabelle offered additional suggestions to clarify Monica’s conclusion when writing the progress report. In both instances, Isabelle offered direct feedback to her novices, but in one instance Isabelle allowed her novice to arrive at a solution.

Conversely, Nancy regularly asked questions guiding her novices toward solutions. For instance, when Rita needed support planning math lesson activities, Nancy provided feedback in the form of a question ("Are you continuing to only focus on number identification and one-to-one correspondence?") to guide Rita’s thinking. Similarly, when Nancy helped Charlotte with a math goal for a student, she used a question ("because he is a memorizer?") meant to guide Charlotte’s thinking about how the student learned.

Nancy and Isabelle’s perceptions of guiding novices’ thinking align with research on novice teacher induction. Griffin (2010) found successful mentors guided novice SETs’ thinking and avoided directly providing solutions to problems. Similarly, Upson Bradbury (2010) determined mentors should not impose their teaching style and values on novices but rather allow them to develop naturally. Although the current findings show there were times Isabelle did not permit her novices to solve problems of practice on their own, Van Ginkel et al. (2016) argued that utilizing directive and non-directive mentoring skills to respond to novices’ needs demonstrates a mentor’s versatility. Similarly, Feiman-Nemser’s (2001) case study indicated that using direct feedback was just another way a mentor can provide support to a novice teacher.

When examining the first major finding against the theoretical framework, a direct link can be found to reflective practice. Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) model of reflective practice includes five key features reflective teachers embody: a) frame problems of practice and b) be aware of assumptions and beliefs, c) cultural/school context, d) curriculum development and school change, and e) responsibility for own learning. Nancy and Isabelle addressed these key
features when providing feedback and asking questions to encourage the novice SETs’ self-reflection.

Table 6.1 provides examples of feedback and/or questions Nancy and Isabelle utilized that encouraged self-reflection, paralleling the key features of Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) reflective practice model. Framing problems of practice helps novices more clearly identify a solution and/or allows them to view the problem from a different perspective. As seen in Table 6.1, Nancy’s feedback was meant to help her novice reflect on a student’s abilities. While Isabelle used a question to guide her novice to reflect on the appropriateness of a resource. In both cases, the mentors encouraged self-reflection by helping the novices frame their problems of practice.

As the second key feature of Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) model of reflective practice suggests, understanding and addressing one’s assumptions and beliefs is essential for reflective teachers. Examples provided in Table 6.1 demonstrate how mentors used questions to help novices examine their own beliefs to solve problems of practice. Nancy wanted her novice to evaluate how she defined a math skill, while Isabelle encouraged her novice to examine her assumptions about IEP goals.

Similarly, Nancy and Isabelle wanted their novices to reflect on the cultural/school context, the third key feature of the reflective practice model, because the environment could have an impact on how they solved their problems of practice. Novices needed to understand their role within the school community, perspectives on academic and behavioral instruction, and their level of autonomy in making decisions (Rosenberg et al., 1997). Table 6.1 provides an example in which Nancy offered historical cultural knowledge as feedback for her novice to
consider when addressing a behavioral concern. Similarly, Isabelle offered feedback meant to give context about her novice’s role as a teacher.

Table 6.1

Key Features of Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) Reflective Practice Model with Mentor Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Feature of Reflective Practice</th>
<th>Definition of Feature</th>
<th>Examples in Mentoring Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frame Problems of Practice</strong></td>
<td>Using values, knowledge, and/or experiences to develop a new perspective of a problem</td>
<td>&quot;He’s tricky because he doesn’t always show you what he knows. He has so many skills, but also barriers.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aware of Assumptions and Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>Willingness to examine own understandings and ideals and take appropriate action</td>
<td>&quot;How do you define simple? Given single digit? Or within 10?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural/School Context</strong></td>
<td>Attentive to institutional perspectives and cultural environment within the school</td>
<td>&quot;The only thing I think you would want to process if you do go the sorry note route, I’ve seen several cases where it turns into like a power struggle. It becomes like punishment versus a learning experience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum Development &amp; School Change</strong></td>
<td>Creating curricular and/or instructional change that impacts own or others’ classrooms</td>
<td>&quot;What if you took the opposite approach? Where they are not doing things individually, but you’re doing them jointly?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility for Own Learning</strong></td>
<td>Being responsible for own professional growth</td>
<td>“I’m wondering…as you’re learning how to modify the stories, so you don’t have to think about it on the fly since it’s still new to you…if you created Google slides of the story.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Curricular and instructional decision-making were necessary and often complex responsibilities for novices. Nancy and Isabelle recognized novices needed to understand how to adapt their instructional strategies and curricular resources to meet students’ needs. Nancy and Isabelle encouraged reflection on novices’ current practices to solve problems they encountered. As Zeichner and Liston (1996) identify in the fourth key feature, reflective teachers can create change within the school environment when reflecting on problems of practice and sharing solutions with others. Examples in Table 6.1 substantiate how Nancy and Isabelle used questions to help novices reflect on their instructional strategies.

For novices to grow in their teaching practices, Nancy and Isabelle felt it was important they be responsible for their own professional development, the fifth key feature of Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) reflective practice model. By utilizing feedback and questions, mentors encouraged novices to reflect on areas of professional growth. Nancy encouraged her novice to create a support to be used while becoming more proficient with a curriculum. Isabelle encouraged her novice to reflect on her practice after gaining knowledge from another teacher. Both mentors saw value in novices taking responsibility for their own professional growth.

Finding #2: Mentors’ Content Knowledge Should Include Identifying Instructional Strategies and Completing IEP Paperwork

The second significant finding from this study is that Nancy and Isabelle felt they needed specific content knowledge to help novices solve problems of practice. They noted that the most problematic areas for novice SETs included identifying instructional strategies and completing IEP paperwork. It is not surprising novices struggled with these responsibilities, as research also indicates similar conclusions. Billingsley et al.’s (2009) research on special education teacher
induction found that new special educators were concerned with meeting curricular and instructional needs of students through the appropriate use of instructional strategies. Additionally, Billingsley et al. determined that novices required significant assistance with understanding special education legal requirements such as completing IEP paperwork. Likewise, Youngs et al. (2011) recommended novice SETs should have induction support to help them with curricular and instructional duties and with developing students’ IEPs.

Specific instructional strategies for which novices needed the most support included a) identifying and adapting resources, b) lesson planning, and c) adapting instruction. Several examples of mentors providing support with instructional strategies were found in interviews, mentor-SET meetings, and journal entries, a few of which are presented in Table 6.2.

The examples in Table 6.2 represent how Nancy and Isabelle provided feedback on identifying and adapting resources, planning lessons, and adapting instruction to meet students’ needs. The mentors found their novices lacked experience and content knowledge required to meet the highly varied needs of their students. Bay and Parker-Katz’s (2009) meta-analysis supports a similar conclusion that mentors need to provide assistance in finding appropriate instructional materials as well as guidance on adapting curriculum to meet students’ needs. Similarly, Billingsley et al. (2009) concluded that curriculum and teaching strategies were pedagogical concerns for all novice SETs (see also Urbach et al., 2015).
### Table 6.2

Examples of Nancy and Isabelle Providing Support with Instructional Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategy</th>
<th>Nancy’s Examples</th>
<th>Isabelle’s Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifying and adapting resources</strong></td>
<td>• “I spent most of my time supporting my new teachers with finding new and appropriate resources” (Journal 16)</td>
<td>• “I spent most of my time helping novices with differentiating materials” (Journal 3)</td>
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<td>• “When I am doing a pop in in the classroom, I’m assessing if the resources are applicable or being used accurately.” (Interview 6)</td>
<td>• “How does he do with adapted books? Like the kind with matching activities, just in book format?” (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)</td>
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<td>• “So I would maybe go with manipulatives because it’s just more clear-cut that two means two things.” (Mentor-SET Meeting 7)</td>
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<td><strong>Lesson planning</strong></td>
<td>• “I spent most of my time helping novices with adapting their lesson plans to be digital and thinking of new creative ideas!” (Journal 15)</td>
<td>• “I spent most of my time problem solving specific lessons (e.g., pacing, differentiation, flow)” (Journal 3)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Her groups still have a long way to come to be well oiled. So we talk about her groups…What the structure looks like.” (Interview 7)</td>
<td>• “We’ve talked about getting a shell, bones to her lessons” (Interview 1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “There’s a fairly smooth method to how you’re implementing your lesson…maybe your next step could be to develop a [lesson] sequence.” (Mentor-SET Meeting 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adapting instruction</strong></td>
<td>• “I was able to help a second-year teacher think critically about how to teach a skill to a tricky student and we were able to collaborate on narrowing down which skills were most important along with me modeling what guided reading could look like for him.” (Journal 12)</td>
<td>• “You know the touch chat editor that…shows her the pathway to answer a question or request help? What if you adapted it?” (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “What if you took the opposite approach? Where they are not doing things individually, but you’re doing them jointly?” (Mentor-SET Meeting 6)</td>
<td>• “What if you presented your question like on a whiteboard? Do think he’d still put that last word in his device?” (Mentor-SET Meeting 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nancy and Isabelle also recognized their novices struggled with tasks such as writing IEP goals, writing progress reports, and utilizing assessment results. Nancy commented, “Almost all of them require some handholding through the IEP process” (Interview 5). Similarly, Isabelle related, “All [novices] went to the training that administration presented about report writing; however, they [novices] still required a lot of help” (Mentor Journal 2). Mentors’ perceptions align with findings in Bay and Parker-Katz’s (2009) study that recommend mentors should be able to communicate and provide guidance on writing IEPs, procedural safeguards, and assessment procedures to novice SETs. Similarly, Ansari Ricci and Zetlin (2013) found that one type of support mentors should provide was with IEP-related issues. White and Mason (2006) also found the most common areas new SETs asked for assistance with were special education paperwork and IEPs; similarly, Griffin’s (2010) research indicated novice SETs reported needing information on the content and procedures for completing IEP paperwork. Upson Bradbury (2010) shared mentors play a necessary role in providing content knowledge to novices, but they noted it needs to be balanced with allowing novices to make their own decisions on problems of practice.

Mentors’ process for supporting novices with content knowledge problems of practice aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of knowledge formation. Vygotsky theorized learning occurs when a learner is provided guidance by a more experienced person to complete a task or solve a problem that cannot yet be achieved independently. Between a learner’s actual level of independent learning and level of potential learning Vygotsky deemed this as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is within the ZPD where learning occurs.

Based on Vygotsky’s theory, I initially assumed educative mentors’ support was passively situated within the ZPD of novice teachers. As novices encountered problems of
practice, they sought support from educative mentors. Once a solution was developed, the novice moved to a higher level of learning, while the educative mentor remained situated within the novice’s ZPD until a new problem of practice was encountered.

However, in reality, educative mentors take an active role in novices’ knowledge formation and promotion of growth in their teaching practices. Mentoring support begins at the independent learning level where educative mentors can anticipate and identify novices’ problems of practice. Educative mentors then guide novices’ thinking by utilizing mentoring strategies to scaffold their support to bridge novices’ ZPDs. Mentors continue their support through the novices’ subsequent potential levels of learning. Educatve mentors support for novice SETs is continual rather than fixed. Figure 6.1 illustrates an educative mentor’s support bridging a novice’s ZPD.

![Figure 6.1: Educative mentor’s role in novice’s zone of proximal development (ZPD).](image)

The role of an educative mentor is to provide growth-producing learning opportunities for novices (Schwille, 2008). An educative mentor can determine when a novice may struggle with a problem of practice. Through continual support, mentoring strategies can be utilized to guide the novice’s thinking toward identifying their own solutions. Feiman-Nemser (2001) explained
educative mentors are situated in practice with a disposition toward promoting novices’ growth. Remaining static in a novice’s ZPD until a problem of practice is brought to the educative mentor does not allow a mentor to consistently guide the novice’s thinking or promote self-reflection. Only problems of practice considered important by the novice will be addressed when the educative mentor does not take an active role. As Schwille (2008) described, educative mentors guide novices’ knowledge construction by providing scaffolded learning opportunities.

**Finding #3: Establishment of Mentoring Relationships Requires Mentors to Gain Novices’ Trust and Provide Emotional Support**

The third finding to emerge from this study is that a mentor-novice SET relationship needs to be established for mentoring to be effective. Both Nancy and Isabelle believed building genuine relationships with their novices was essential. Nancy noted, “You can’t get anywhere unless you have a solid relationship” (Interview 5). Likewise, Isabelle remarked, “You need to be building those relationships and the foundation to get your mentees to really open up and be honest with you” (Interview 4).

Nancy and Isabelle felt the foundation of mentor-mentee relationships was built on trust and emotional support. They agreed that trust allowed for more open and honest dialogue and helped establish a safe environment in which novices, and likewise mentors, could voice concerns, raise problems, and share in accomplishments. Once trust was built, Nancy and Isabelle encouraged the novices’ growth by creating learning opportunities based on novices’ teaching practice. For example, Nancy shared her experience of working with a novice with whom she had difficulty gaining trust. However, once trust was established Nancy helped the novice with lesson planning after observing in her classroom. Schwille (2008) describes the
essence of educative mentoring as mentors intentionally providing learning opportunities for novices to improve their understanding of teaching and learn how to teach effectively. Schwille also notes that a foundational piece of mentor-novice relationships in educative mentoring is the culture of accepting not having all the answers but be willing to collaboratively learn to solve problems.

Nancy and Isabelle understood providing emotional support was a way to connect with novices and be responsive to their needs. For both mentors, emotional support meant creating an environment in which novices felt comfortable sharing their feelings and expressing their concerns. As an example, April voiced her concerns to Isabelle about how her paraprofessional lacked planning skills for community-based instruction. To acknowledge April’s frustration and build trust, Isabelle responded, “So, tell me more” (Mentor-SET Meeting 2). Not wanting to simply provide emotional support but also to help solve April’s problem, Isabelle followed up by asking, “Oh, is the social worker planning that?” (Mentor-SET Meeting 2). Isabelle’s response demonstrated she was interested in hearing more about April’s concern.

Emotional support also meant providing encouragement and validation, while guiding novices toward problem-solving. Nancy and Isabelle’s perceptions about emotional support align with the conclusion from Kilburg’s (2007) case study that the most vital induction support novices needed was emotional support. Billingsley et al.’s (2004) definition of emotional support includes mentors possessing interpersonal skills such as relationship building and effective communication. For Nancy and Isabelle, the manifestation of emotional support was creating a safe environment in which novices felt they could share their concerns and their voices were heard. As an example, Monica shared her frustrations about not feeling heard by other team members. To create an environment in which Monica felt secure sharing her concerns, Isabelle
prompted her to describe the problem. Providing validation and building novices’ confidence were also emotional support strategies utilized by mentors, which aligns with Griffin’s (2010) research on beginning special education teacher induction studies. Griffin identified emotional support included listening, sharing experiences, providing encouragement, and problem-solving discussions. Similarly, McDonald and Flint (2011) identified that good communication and listening skills were essential in mentoring relationships. McDonald and Flint suggested establishing mentoring relationships and offering emotional support are prerequisites for the growth of novices’ teaching practices.

Nancy and Isabelle found emotional support could lead to novices’ growth in teaching practice and problem solving. By addressing novices’ emotional needs, mentors could strengthen trust, thereby increasing novices’ willingness to address problems of practice. This increased disposition toward problem-solving when provided with emotional support demonstrates an interconnectedness of two types of mentoring supports. Ansari Ricci and Zetlin (2013) came to a similar conclusion in their mixed method study of mentor interactions with novice special educators in an alternative certification program. They found mentoring relationships was built on blending emotional and instructional support. Similarly, Israel et al. (2014) concluded that emotional and professional support did not occur in isolation but instead were collectively embedded. Conversely, Ragins and Kram (2007) stated emotional and professional support are distinctly separate and each serves its own function. However, they also suggested that a need exists for greater understanding of the gap between mentoring research and practice.

Relationships Nancy and Isabelle established with their novices can be compared to communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice as a cooperative of like-minded individuals who develop, reconcile, and share their own theories and understandings
to increase learning among its members. Often communities of practice are established informally, and their intentional development is not essential (Wenger). However, in educative mentoring relationships, communities of practice should intentionally be formed to meet novices’ needs. For instance, experienced mentors with specific content knowledge should be utilized to provide mentoring support (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009). Similarly, mentors who promote self-reflection can increase novices’ learning (McDonald & Flint, 2011). Educatively mentoring creates a culture of contextual learning from more knowledgeable individuals just as in a community of practice.

Wenger and Wenger-Traynor (2015) identified three main characteristics that are necessary in a community of practice which are illustrated in Figure 6.2.

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![Figure 6.2: Characteristics of a community of practice.](image-url)
In the characteristic of domain, an educative mentor and novice have a shared interest and common purpose for solving problems situated within the novice’s classroom and practice (Parker-Katz & Bay, 2008; Schwille, 2008). Billingsley et al. (2004) suggested the context of mentors’ support was as important as how needs were addressed. For Nancy and Isabelle this meant creating learning opportunities from novices’ own problems of practice (e.g., completing IEP paperwork). A strategy often used by mentors was to spend time in their novices’ classrooms to better understand the problems and needs. This strategy not only demonstrated a shared interest and common purpose, but it also led to building trust.

In the second characteristic, community, Nancy and Isabelle knew trust was a necessary part of establishing relationships in a community of practice. So, they focused on open communication and remaining non-judgmental during their formal and informal meetings with novices. Nancy and Isabelle felt that having trusting relationships meant novices were more willing to share their feelings and were more open to feedback and support when solving problems of practice.

Practice is the final characteristic that is part of the community of practice in that members share their knowledge and experiences to increase their own and others’ learning. Contributions by all members of the community of practice were accepted and valued in interactions Nancy and Isabelle had with their novices. Both mentors shared their content knowledge and experiences while they also listened to the novices’ ideas and decisions about their problems of practice.

While each characteristic is important and necessary, all three must be present to form a community of practice. In this study, the educative mentors, experienced community members, shared content knowledge and experiences while creating learning opportunities for their
novices. The novice, as a newcomer to the community, was encouraged to bring their own
knowledge and experiences to the learning opportunities. Together Nancy and Isabelle and their
novices exchanged ideas, experiences, and knowledge to create new knowledge and
understanding.

Limitations of the Study

As in all research, limitations existed within this study. Limitations occurred in the
methodology of the research, specifically in the amount of data collected. Multiple sources of
evidence are necessary to ensure findings or conclusions are accurately represented (Yin, 2014).
While data were collected through four semi-structured interviews with each mentor, audio
recordings of mentor-novice meetings, and monthly mentor journal entries, additional data
should have been collected to answer the research questions more thoroughly.

Another data collection method that could have been added to this study is direct
observation of mentor-novice dyads during instructional activities in the classroom. Utilizing
direct observations could have provided firsthand accounts of how the mentors used their
knowledge and skills without having to rely on interpretation through the mentor’s recall of an
account (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also, observations could have provided nuanced mentor-
novice interactions that cannot be visualized or understood through other data collection
methods. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggests, not much is known about how educative mentors
utilize their knowledge and skills when supporting novices, so using observations could have
illustrated specific activities and dialogue used by mentors.

Furthermore, the number of audio-recorded mentor-SET meetings should have been
increased to include all novice SETs who received mentoring. Only two novice SETs for each
mentor were selected to have their mentor-mentee meetings recorded and transcribed in this study. Increasing the number of meetings would have provided a more substantial understanding of how these mentors used their knowledge and skills when providing educative mentoring.

Finally, the sample size of mentors utilized for this study created a limitation. While the research was designed as a case study that aims to exam a phenomenon in the context of the real-world (Yin, 2014), having a larger sample size of mentors would be preferred. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend having an adequate number of participants, so saturation is reached in data being collected and analyzed. The sample size of two mentors utilized for this study may not have provided sufficient data to reach adequate saturation.

Recommendations for Mentors

As the field of special education continues to experience a shortage of qualified teachers, a need persists to retain novice SETs and reduce teacher turnover. Induction support for novice SETs is necessary to help them persist and flourish through their beginning years of teaching. The most significant induction support for novices to grow in their teaching practice is having a mentor (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Corcoran-Nielsen et al., 2007; Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012; Griffin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009). However, it is not just an assignment of a mentor that will help a novice SET grow in their practice. Instead, being paired with an educative mentor who encourages reflection and provides growth-producing experiences can help novice SETs improve their teaching skills (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Schwille, 2008).

While research tells us mentors are a significant induction support, little is known about how they utilize knowledge and skills to provide support within mentoring practice (Feiman-
Nemser, 2001). Identifying knowledge and skills utilized is necessary for understanding how mentors can impact novices’ practice. Therefore, the first recommendation is that it is crucial for mentors to guide novices toward finding solutions to problems of practice without directly offering answers. Griffin (2010) reminds us mentors should use their strategies to help novices arrive at solutions on their own. Likewise, Upson Bradbury (2010) defines roles of educative mentors as not coercing novices to adopt mentors’ solutions but rather to support the development of reflection and examination of practice.

Two specific strategies Nancy and Isabelle utilized to guide novices’ thinking were providing feedback and asking questions. When providing feedback, mentors should make suggestions or provide additional information (i.e., content knowledge) to help novices frame their problems of practice. Feedback should be purposeful without being obtrusive. When asking questions, mentors should use them to draw novices’ attention to perspectives not previously considered or to gain additional information. Questions can be scaffolded to guide novices’ thinking toward a solution.

When mentors utilize strategies, such as providing feedback and asking questions, they are supporting novices in solving problems while also strengthening novices’ reflection skills. Zeichner and Liston (1996) shared reflection skills are important because they are a starting point for practitioners to understand where to make improvements in teaching practice. Mentors, themselves, should be skilled reflective practitioners to not only support novices’ growth but also to frame and solve their own mentoring problems of practice.

For educative mentors to support the needs of novice teachers they must understand how learning occurs within a novice’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Since the mentors’ role is enacted across the ZPD they must be able to identify when a novice needs support with a
problem of practice. Mentors should be well-versed in mentoring strategies that bridge novices’ ZPDs. Being skilled in providing effective feedback and asking scaffolded questions allows educative mentors to actively guide novices through their ZPDs. Mentors should participate in ongoing professional development (PD) meant to strengthen reflection skills. PD opportunities should allow mentors to learn, practice, and discuss mentoring strategies with other educative mentors. In addition, planned observations of novices’ teaching practices followed by discussion with other mentors can also help improve mentoring and reflection skills. Upson Bradbury (2010) reminds us that it is beneficial for mentors to contextually practice their skills. While Feiman-Nemser and Carver (2012) share it is necessary for mentors to improve their knowledge of mentoring practices by discussing their own problems. To be effective in guiding novice teachers to solve their own problems educative mentors must continually practice and hone their mentoring skills in an environment with access to other educative mentors.

Another recommendation is for educative mentors to have content knowledge specific to novices’ problems of practice. For mentors to provide effective feedback and ask appropriate questions, they need to have the necessary content knowledge to guide novices’ thinking. In this study, mentors required a solid understanding of instructional practices and IEP paperwork to provide effective support. Novice SETs are expected to have specialized knowledge in adapting curriculum and instruction and completing IEP paperwork (Billingsley et al., 2004; Urbach et al., 2015; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011) since their students’ needs can vary widely.

To support novice SETs with problems of practice, it is necessary for mentors to understand high-leverage practices in special education (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017), which are the foundation of effective special education teaching practices. Specifically, mentors should know how to identify and adapt resources, plan lessons,
and adapt instruction, as these are common areas for problems of practice. To gain an understanding of novice SETs’ specific problems, mentors should spend time in novices’ classrooms – not just observing but interacting with students.

Mentors also need to be well-versed in the requirements and practices for completing IEP paperwork because novice SETs often struggle with this portion of their teaching role. Mentors should be knowledgeable about the school/district’s processes and procedures for writing IEPs, assessment, and progress reporting as well as procedural safeguards (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009). Discussions with school/district administrators can provide mentors with IEP processes and procedural expectations. In addition, it is important for mentors to strengthen their knowledge of learning and content standards to guide novices when writing IEP goals. Mentors should understand the performance levels of students to better guide novices in developing IEP goals. To assess students’ performance, it is necessary for mentors to be active participants (i.e., interacting with students) in novice teachers’ classrooms.

Mentors should establish and prioritize strong relationships with their novice SETs to facilitate novices’ growth as teachers. To establish relationships, mentors must gain novices’ trust while providing emotional support. Trust within mentor-mentee relationships is critical because novices need a safe space to share their feelings, concerns, and frustrations. Trust also promotes an environment in which mentors and novices are more willing to take risks with problem solving strategies (Gardiner & Weisling, 2015).

Emotional support is also necessary for mentors to establish relationships with novices. While providing validation and empathy are important skills for mentors, equally as important is being able to guide novices’ emotional needs toward problem solving. Mentors should be able to provide emotional support but also promote reflection and provide growth opportunities for
novices as well (Young et al., 2005), which are pre-cursors for novices’ changing their teaching practices (McDonald & Flint, 2011).

Strong interpersonal skills are necessary for mentors to establish relationships with novices. Such skills include being a competent communicator, effectively listening, self-regulation, and forming connections with others (Ansari Ricci & Zetlin, 2013; McDonald & Flint, 2011). Self-assessment can help mentors understand where they may need additional training or support to strengthen skills. Mentors should then seek out learning opportunities to improve interpersonal skills they have assessed as needing improvement. Young et al. (2005) said it is necessary to prepare and support mentors in their work including emotional availability and critical thinking.

Lastly, to develop effective mentoring relationships, which forms a community of practice (COP), intentionality is required when selecting educative mentors and pairing them with novices. While Wenger and Wenger-Traynor (2015) do not describe intentionality in the formation of a COP, its characteristics (see Figure 6.2) indicate intentional selection of educative mentors is beneficial. Experienced mentors with backgrounds similar to their novices allow for more supportive and effective mentoring relationships (White & Mason, 2006). It is also necessary for educative mentors to have the content knowledge needed to address novice SETs’ problems of practice (Billingsley et al., 2004). Educative mentors must be willing to broaden their knowledge if their experiences and background are not aligned with their novices. This will require mentors to be perpetual learners, not assuming they have all the necessary knowledge. Furthermore, educative mentors must understand the importance and be able to provide emotional support to novices (Ansari Ricci & Zetlin, 2013; Griffin, 2010). Having empathy and validating novices’ feelings are one part of providing emotional support. Mentors must be aware
of how to provide emotional support that is encouraging yet productive. Meaning mentors should provide growth opportunities for novices when offering emotional support.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides a preliminary exploration of educative mentoring support for novice SETs, more research is needed on the topic. The participant sample for this study consisted of two Caucasian female mentors. Increasing the number of mentors will provide a wider understanding of the knowledge and skills that are or can be utilized in educative mentoring.

The study was conducted at a therapeutic day school for students with special needs. However, conducting a study in a different setting, such as a public elementary or high school, would provide different perspectives and lived experiences for both mentors and novice SETs. Knowledge and skills utilized by mentors may differ in another setting as the needs of students will most likely vary.

Another limitation of this study provides an opportunity for further research. Data collection methods used for this study included semi-structured interviews, mentor journals, and audio recorded mentor-SET meetings. However, no data were collected that required direct observations of mentors utilizing their knowledge and skills. Adding observational data collection would provide first-hand accounts of mentors providing support in a naturalistic setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Further research can also be considered based on the theoretical framework from this study. In educative mentoring, mentors purposefully create learning and growth opportunities for novices (Schwille, 2008) that take place in the novice’s ZPD. However, educative mentors’
support is not fixed within the novices’ ZPD, but rather bridges it from the actual to potential levels of learning (see Figure 6.1). Additional research is needed for a greater understanding of how mentors scaffold support and bridge novices’ ZPD to continuous higher levels of learning. Possible questions to examine include: a) What specific tasks do mentors perform that promote novices’ growth, b) What scaffolded strategies do mentors use to assist novices through their ZPD to higher learning levels, and c) How does a mentor utilize emotional support to help a novice to higher levels of learning in their ZPD? Understanding how mentors bridge novices’ ZPD will provide insight into developing a framework of the knowledge and skills educative mentors need for effective mentoring.

Finally, additional research is needed on communities of practice (COP) in relation to educative mentoring relationships. Members in a COP share experiences and knowledge within a trusting relationship (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Wenger-Traynor, 2015) as do mentors and novices within an educative mentor relationship. But the needs of novice SETs are unique and require individualized support (Billingsley et al., 2004). For this reason, choosing educative mentors should be done intentionally. A greater understanding exists for knowing how to select educative mentors purposefully for special education teachers. Additional research questions include: a) What are the most important characteristics needed by educative mentors, b) How do mentors’ characteristics impact development of the community of practice, and c) How do certain characteristics of an educative mentor impact a novice’s growth in problem solving and in teaching practice? Understanding the role mentors play in educative mentoring relationships is necessary for ensuring mentors’ success. In addition, understanding specific characteristics of effective mentors can add to the development of an educative mentoring practice framework.
Conclusion

Novice teachers have a difficult job given they are expected to teach yet learn how to teach at the same time (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The job becomes even more difficult as novice SETs are expected to have specialized knowledge about all facets of the job (e.g., completing IEP paperwork) as they support learners with unique and differentiated needs. When a novice SET is shown their classroom on the first day and no support is provided, it should not come as a surprise when the novice quickly becomes overwhelmed. However, when given support, such as being assigned an educative mentor, a novice SET can survive and thrive during the first years of teaching. Teaching skills can improve when an educative mentor encourages reflection and promotes growth producing experiences stemming from novices’ own practice. A trusting relationship between mentors and mentees combined with emotional support allows for novices’ growth, strengthens novices’ skills, and increases their desire to remain in the classroom. As one novice SET shared in a mentor-SET meeting, “One of the big reasons I’m still here is because of my mentor.”

Floodgates continue to be open for special education teachers leaving the field. An urgent need for minimizing the flow exists. Providing novice SETs with the support of a purposefully selected educative mentor can make the difference between a novice SET leaving or staying in the field. But being purposeful in the selection of a mentor does not merely mean the mentor and novice are in the same school building or they both teach special education. It is necessary to consider the genuine needs of novice SETs when making decisions about educative mentor dyads. Novice SETs have unique needs as do the students in their classrooms. Therefore, it is paramount educative mentors supporting novice SETs have the requisite
knowledge and skills. We cannot expect novice SETs to teach students with significant or complex needs without providing them with support to do so. It would be the same as trying to carry water in a fishing net.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

EDUCATIVE MENTOR DEFINITION
Educative Mentor -

An educative mentor uses her knowledge and skills to support a novice teacher by assessing the needs of the novice teacher and creating meaningful learning opportunities within the novice teacher’s own classroom. The educative mentor focuses on setting a climate for inquiry and promotes reflection for the novice teacher. The educative mentor provides more than just emotional and procedural mentoring support. The educative mentor guides the novice teacher through experiences to promote her growth as a novice teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schwille, 2008).
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: MENTOR TEACHER
Northern Illinois University
Consent to Participant in Research Study

Mentor Teacher

Title of Study: Educative Mentoring for Novice Special Education Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

Researcher: Sherry Bochenek

I agree to participate in the research study, Mentor’s Perceptions of the Knowledge and Skills Required to Provide Educative Mentoring to Novice Special Education Teachers being conducted by Sherry Bochenek, a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to examine what knowledge and skills mentor teachers think they need to provide educative mentoring support to novice special education teachers.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following over the course of eight months, beginning in September 2019 and ending in April 2020:

- Complete four face-to-face interviews. Each interview should take approximately take 45 minutes to complete and will be audio recorded.

- Allow the researcher to observe during mentoring sessions with novice special education teachers; one time in the classroom and two times during 1-to-1 mentoring sessions. 1-to-1 mentoring sessions will be audio recorded.

- Complete monthly written journal prompt responses for 8 months (8 total responses). Written responses should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Sherry Bochenek via phone at [redacted] or via email at [redacted] or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at [redacted]. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at [redacted].

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include understanding the specific knowledge and skills needed by mentor teachers to support novice special education teachers due to their unique needs as teachers and understanding how educative mentoring might be an effective support for novice special education teachers given that no research currently exists in this area.
I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. Measures will be taken to protect the participants in the study and keep data confidential. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants and to the school where the study takes place. Transcriptions of interview and observation data will utilize pseudonyms. Only Sherry Bochenek will have knowledge of the participants’ actual names. Data collected throughout the study, including audio recordings and researcher’s notes, will be kept either in a locked fireproof box or password protected flash drive.

I understand that my signature below indicates that I have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and I have read and understood the information provided above. I acknowledge that I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form.

_______________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature                  Date

I give my consent to be audio recorded during interviews and mentoring sessions for this study.

_______________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature                  Date
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM:
NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER
Northern Illinois University
Consent to Participant in Research Study
Novice Special Education Teacher

Title of Study: Educative Mentoring for Novice Special Education Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

Researcher: Sherry Bochenek

I agree to participate in the research study, Mentor’s Perceptions of the Knowledge and Skills Essential to Providing Educative Mentoring to Novice Special Education Teachers being conducted by Sherry Bochenek, a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to examine what knowledge and skills mentor teachers think they need to provide educative mentoring support to novice special education teachers.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following over the course of eight months, beginning in September 2019 and ending in April 2020:

- Allow the researcher to observe during mentoring sessions with assigned mentor teacher; one time in the classroom and two times during 1-to-1 mentoring sessions. 1-to-1 mentoring sessions will be audio recorded.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Sherry Bochenek via phone at [mask] or via email at [mask] or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at [mask]. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at [mask].

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include understanding the specific knowledge and skills needed by mentor teachers to support novice special education teachers due to their unique needs as teachers and understanding how educative mentoring might be an effective support for novice special education teachers since no research currently exists in this area.

I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. Measures will be taken to protect the participants in the study and keep data confidential. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants and to the school where the study takes place. Transcriptions of interview and observation data will utilize pseudonyms. Only Sherry Bochenek will have knowledge of the participants’ actual names. Data collected throughout the study, including audio recordings and researcher’s notes, will be kept either in a locked fireproof box or password protected flash drive.
I understand that my signature below indicates that I have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and I have read and understood the information provided above. I acknowledge that I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form.

_______________________________________  _______________________
Participant’s Signature                      Date

I give my consent to be audio recorded during mentoring sessions for this study.

_______________________________________  _______________________
Participant’s Signature                      Date
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
September
Introduction & Demographic Information

What is your background with special education (# of years teaching, locations taught, grade levels taught, disabilities taught)?

How long have you been a mentor?

Why did you decide to become a mentor?

What preparation have you received to become a mentor?

Please describe your role and responsibilities related to mentoring novice SETs.

(RQ1) In your opinion, what makes a mentor effective?
   - What are the characteristics that she/he should possess?
   - What knowledge you feel she/he should have?
   - What practices should a mentor use to support a novice SET?

(RQ2) At this point in the school year, what do you think novice SETs’ most significant needs are? What do you think are their least significant needs? Why?

(RQ2) When novice SETs are seeking your support, what are the things they are asking for help with?

(RQ2) What are the mentoring strategies you are using to support novice SETs?

(RQ1) What influenced your decision to use a particular strategy?

(RQ1) Where do you feel you provide the most support to novice SETs during formal mentoring meetings, informal mentoring meetings, or in the classroom?
December

**Member check** - Begin by reviewing October mentor-SET meeting recording transcript and September-November journal entries and ask follow-up questions related to mentor-SET meeting transcripts, journals, and/or previous interview transcripts

(RQ2) At this point in the school year, what do you think are novice SETs most significant needs? What do you think are their least significant needs? Why?

(RQ1) Where do you feel you provide the most support to novice SETs during formal mentoring meetings, informal mentoring meetings, or in the classroom?

(RQ2) How often do you think novice SETs are seeking your support outside of mentoring meetings and what kind of support are they needing?

(RQ2) What are the mentoring strategies you are using to support novice SETs?

(RQ1) What influenced your decision to use a particular strategy?

(RQ1) What have you learned from your mentoring experiences so far?

February

**Member check** - Begin by reviewing January mentor-SET meeting recording transcripts and December-January journal entries and ask follow-up questions related to mentor-SET meeting transcripts, journals, and/or previous interview transcripts

(RQ2) At this point in the school year, what do you think are novice SETs most significant needs? What do you think are their least significant needs? Why?

(RQ) Where do you feel you provide the most support to novice SETs during formal mentoring meetings, informal mentoring meetings, or in the classroom? Why did you make this particular choice?

(RQ2) What mentoring strategies are you using to provide support to novice SETs to meet their specific needs?

(RQ2) How often do you think novice SETs are seeking your support outside of mentoring meetings and what kind of support are they needing?

(RQ2) How have you encouraged the novice SETs you support to utilize reflection?

(RQ1) What have you learned from your mentoring experiences so far?
April

*Member check* - Begin by reviewing March mentor-SET meeting recording transcripts and February-March journal entries and ask follow-up questions related to mentor-SET meeting transcripts, journal entries, and/or previous interview transcripts.

(RQ1) This year, where do you feel you provided the most support to novice SETs, during formal mentoring meetings, informal mentoring meetings, or in the classroom?

(RQ1) What aspects of mentoring have you felt the most confident in this year?

(RQ1) What aspects of mentoring have you found to be the most challenging?

(RQ1) What have you learned from your mentoring experiences this year?

(RQ1) In what areas would you like to further develop competence in?

(RQ1) What additional support do you feel you might need to develop this competence?
Monthly Mentor Journal Prompts

1) During mentoring meetings or mentoring activities this month, I spent most of my time supporting novice SETs with….

2) This month my new teachers really struggled with…

3) This month my new teachers seemed to do well with…

4) I felt most effective as a mentor this month when …. 

5) The global pandemic effected my mentoring activities by…
   (This prompt was only used during March and April, which coincided with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic)