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## Advocates and Gatekeepers: Dialogue on the Multiple Roles of Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors

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## Advocates and Gatekeepers: Dialogue on the Multiple Roles of Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors

### Abstract

Using Valencia et al.'s 2009 article "Complex Interactions in Student Teaching: Lost Opportunities for Learning" as a starting point for dialogue, cooperating teachers (CTs), recent graduates, and current teaching candidates of an English Education Program participated in focus group discussions on the attributes of effective CTs and university supervisors. CTs expressed some anxiety regarding mentors' roles as gatekeepers, as well as understanding regarding the necessity of this role. Additionally, CTs, candidates, and graduates viewed the CT's role as one that is more hands-on early in the field experience with decreasing direct guidance as the candidate develops in her or his professional practice. Implications for practice include explicitly articulating advocate and gatekeeper roles to candidates at the start of each field experience, intentionally discussing candidates' pedagogical content knowledge during post-observation conferences, bridging the perceived gap from theory to practice, directly addressing uncooperative CTs, and strategically sharing mentoring resources.

### Keywords

mentoring, cooperating teacher, teaching candidate

# Advocates and Gatekeepers: Dialogue on the Multiple Roles of Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors

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## Introduction

In response to concern that new teachers' expectations regarding teaching and workload do not match their actual experiences (McCann & Johannessen, 2009), my fellow teacher education colleagues and I—all of us middle/secondary program chairs for our respective content areas—transformed our field experience sequence to require our teaching candidates to engage in 45-90 hours of teaching practicums for each of their last three semesters prior to their full-time teaching internship (a.k.a., student teaching). Each field experience involves increasing responsibilities within the co-teaching model in which both the cooperating teacher (CT) and the candidate are actively engaged in the planning, instruction, and assessment of each lesson in order to best meet the needs of the P-12 students (Bacharach, et al., 2010; Diana, 2014). This increased time in the field makes my mentoring partnership with CTs and other University Supervisors (US) in my program even more important and has caused me to critically reflect on my sometimes conflicting roles as program chair, teaching faculty, and university supervisor. It has also inspired me to reflect on mentoring as a critical practice.

## Review of Literature

Mentoring teacher education candidates requires self-awareness, endurance, and honesty. One of the most important factors in being an effective mentor is the ability to “explain and articulate the act of teaching” (Rudney & Guillame, 2003, p. 11). While having expertise in content and content pedagogy is valuable, cooperating teachers (CTs) and university supervisors (USs) do not need to be perfect English teachers; rather, they need to be able to “[share their] insecurities and how to handle them” (Dippre, 2012, p. 86). In addition, they “must be invested in the success of the student teacher and stay with him or her through the uphill climb of the learning curve” (McClain, 2010, p. 118).

Glenn's (2006) research on the qualities of effective CTs reveals five qualities that emerged from CT-candidate relationships: “effective mentors collaborate rather than dictate, relinquish an appropriate level of control, allow for personal relationships, share constructive feedback, and accept differences” (p. 88). Splichal's (2015) research on pre-service teacher and mentor clinical experiences revealed that CTs must actively initiate and nurture dialogue with candidates regarding instructional design (p. 28). Pfister and Paljevic (2018) found that, in addition to the CT and US, an additional “critical confidant” can provide impactful and effective mentoring to the teacher candidate in the form of safe, emotional support from a slightly more experienced peer. And Gardiner (2009) observed that CTs must be both mentors and managers—having to monitor and manage adults “in terms of timeliness, professionalism and preparedness, and

dealing with sensitive, sometimes interpersonal, issues” (p. 62)—with most mentors feeling uncomfortable and/or unenthusiastic about the managerial aspect of their role.

Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman (2009) found that each member of the triad (the US, the CT, and the candidate) “had to negotiate the shifting terrain of the student teaching experience” and “that opportunities to learn to teach language arts were few and far between” (p. 309) both in terms of classroom practice and the guidance and feedback candidates received from CTs and USs. The experiences of mentors and candidates depicted in Valencia et al.’s article (see Table 2) connected to my own experiences as a CT in Kansas City, Kansas, and later to my experiences as a US in Arizona, Georgia, and now in Kansas. More than anything, this article helped me to reflect on the weaknesses in my mentoring practice (e.g., focusing more on classroom management than content pedagogy in my post-observation conferences with candidates and CTs, not capitalizing on opportunities to help candidates strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge in order to maintain my own peaceful relationship with CTs). Because I benefited so much from this article, I chose to use it as a discussion starter in recent focus groups with teaching candidates, recent graduates, and CTs. In these focus groups, I was particularly interested in the following questions:

1. How do CTs, recent graduates, and current teaching candidates of an English Education Program view mentors’ roles as both advocates and gatekeepers?
2. How do CTs, recent graduates, and current teaching candidates view the CT’s role in mentoring candidates into their own professional practice?
3. What additional insights about mentoring can be gained from structured dialogue among CTs, recent graduates, and current teaching candidates?

## Method

### Participants

The focus group discussions took place at the end of a recent spring semester and included two current teaching candidates in my program, one recent graduate of my program, and three CTs with whom I had recently worked. As I planned both focus group sessions, I ensured that none of the candidates and CTs had worked previously with one another, and at each session I urged them to refrain from naming people with whom they had worked or were currently working in order to maintain privacy (see Appendix A).

Table 1: Focus group participants. All names are pseudonyms.

<b>Focus Group Participants</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Focus Group Session</b>
James	Current teaching candidate (English 6-12)	A
Amy	Recent graduate (English/science 5-8) Current middle school English teacher	A
Barbara	Cooperating teacher – high school English	A
Christine	Cooperating teacher – high school English	B
Denise	Cooperating teacher – middle school English	B

Ellen	Current teaching candidate (English/history 5-8); placed with two CTs (English, history)	B
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### Materials and Procedure

I facilitated focus group sessions because of “their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). This interaction—which I observed, video-recorded, and transcribed—provided the opportunity for my participants to compare and contrast their own mentor/mentee experiences with other participants’ experiences and with the findings from Valencia et al.’s article.

At the start of each focus group session, I explained the importance of both honesty and confidentiality. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that in multiple person interviews, like focus groups, “the relationship between the interviewees is often more important in influencing what is said than the questions posed by the researcher” (p. 122). Consequently, I wanted to establish an environment in which participants felt comfortable speaking candidly about their experiences.

After explaining the purpose of the study and strategies we would use to maintain confidentiality, I reviewed some ground rules, as suggested by Villard (2003), reminding participants that:

1. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your experiences and perspectives,
2. Although I will encourage you to go into detail, you can talk as much or as little as you like, and
3. I ask that you speak one at a time, so that your comments are not misinterpreted later when I transcribe them.

I began each session by summarizing Valencia et al.’s article “Complex Interactions in Student Teaching: Lost Opportunities for Learning,” in order to stimulate discussion. The article illustrates uncomfortable findings related to US-CT-candidate relationships, some of which I have personally experienced in my tenure as English Education program chair (and US) but did not want to frame as such. My written and oral summary of this article (see Table 2) allowed me to offer potential discussion topics without personalizing the issues or assigning blame. Instead, these were ideas and experiences that my participants could either identify with or disconfirm from their own frame of reference.

Table 2: Summary of “Complex Interactions in Student Teaching” (2009) by Valencia et al.

<b>Negotiating the Terrain</b>	<b>Lost Opportunities for Teaching ELA</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates felt like guests in the CT’s classroom and wanted to fit in; however, they also wanted to try out theories, strategies they learned in methods courses (p. 310).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictive course assignments and curriculum guides prevented candidates from making content and pedagogical decisions based on best practice and contextual factors (pp. 313-4).</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CTs expressed a range of views about their roles as teacher educators and how candidates should learn/be mentored:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Mimicry</li><li>○ Grounded Experimentation</li><li>○ Sink or swim (p. 310)</li></ul></li><li>• USs tried to keep the peace between university and CT <i>and</i> between candidate and CT, emphasizing relationships over best practice (p. 313).</li><li>• Candidates viewed CTs and USs as “separate entities” (p. 312).</li><li>• Candidates “performed an identity (Goffman, 1959) that was at odds with the identities they had constructed or wanted to construct” (p. 312) in order to meet CT expectations. Candidates can lose confidence in own abilities this way. Sometimes CTs and USs are not aware there are any conflicts.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• English language arts feedback from CTs and USs was often superficial and sometimes miseducative:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Feedback focused on classroom management, planning, and procedural issues, possibly due to the evaluation form (p. 317).</li><li>○ Some CTs refused to participate in post-observation conferences or only did so grudgingly.</li><li>○ Sometimes issues that could have been framed pedagogically were framed as management issues (e.g., assigning journaling to keep students busy, instead of as a way to engage them in their writing processes) (p. 315).</li><li>○ Supervisors sometimes had concerns about candidates’ pedagogical content knowledge but did not address them in conferences in order “to maintain a front of supporting the cooperating teacher’s practice” (p. 317).</li></ul></li></ul>
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In addition, I provided a list of questions to which participants could respond at their leisure (see Appendix B). I formulated these questions based on questions I have wondered about in my own practice, as well as challenges that have come up regarding our university supervisory model (e.g., question #4 is a result of recommendations that middle/secondary supervisors be assigned specific schools and provide feedback to all candidates at the school regardless of content area and regardless of supervisor content knowledge/teaching experience). Rather than guiding participants through the questions, I encouraged them to respond to whatever seemed most pertinent to them and to talk among themselves while I took notes.

For the purpose of this article, I will focus on two prominent themes in the discussion: (a) the dual role of advocate and gatekeeper for the CT and US, and (b) the process of mentoring teaching candidates into their own practice, from mimicry to experimentation with their own methods, roles, and teacher identities.

## Results and Discussion

### Dual and Conflicting Roles of Mentors

One of the most challenging roles that mentors are expected to play is the dual role of both advocate and gatekeeper, acting “as a student’s advocate one moment and as his or her judge the next” (Rudney & Guilleme, 2003, p. 85). Both CTs and candidates expressed a deep concern for the well-being of P-12 students, with candidates, in particular, noting the clarity and value of

both of the advocate and gatekeeper roles. Current teacher candidate James put it succinctly: “These are fairly defined roles, and I don’t see any problems with them. Student teachers will either rise to the expectation or they’re going to flounder, need some help, or, if worse comes to worse, crash and burn.”

In her response, CT Barbara noted the importance of candidates’ willingness to grow or *teachability*, “a disposition held by a person who is willing to consider and act upon suggestions from knowledgeable others, reflect on practice, and commit to continuous learning (Page et al., 2002)” (Rudney & Guillame, 2003, p. 137).

Barbara: Well, you’ve got to have a gatekeeper somewhere, but I’d hope that that gatekeeper would be the one to offer help first. Sometimes we take things with a grain of salt and do them our own way anyway, and if [candidates are] going to do that, then perhaps the gate needs to be closed. But if [the candidate is] willing to grow, then you don’t have to close the gate; you can leave it open.

Yet CTs also expressed anxiety regarding ending a candidate’s career based on a single placement/semester, etc. It is a worry that I also experience as a US and program chair.

Denise: I understand they’re just students; everybody’s learning. But at some point, they are also going to be the adult in charge of a classroom filled with young students. [One of my colleagues said], I don’t want to be the one who ruins the career of someone. I said, but wouldn’t you rather have that person finally face whatever the truth is about them in *this* position, rather than 40 young children every year going through this room, and [the candidate] being invested in it or maybe not? Where do you draw that line? Where does that come in with the ethics? I mean, most of us would be like, if they’re leering at young girls, No! But there’s more to it than that. It’s not that cut and dry.

In my previous university experience as a US, I did not serve as a program chair or gatekeeper. I provided honest feedback, but there was always another person who would serve in that gatekeeper role. I was an advocate only. Now, as both US and program chair, I see the duality of my role clearly, particularly when I work with struggling candidates. I recognize that I have an obligation to inform candidates along the way regarding issues that may make them unsuitable for teaching; however, I also have a professional obligation to *teach and prepare* candidates. Candidates have the opportunity to withdraw at any point along the way. If they choose to continue in program (and meet minimum requirements in order to move into each new field experience), it is possible that the final student teaching semester will be a deciding factor in terms of recommendation for licensure. The gate can remain open or swing shut at any point in time, including the final semester because, as CT Christine put it, ultimately, “we have to think of what’s best for the [P-12] kids.”

### **Scaffolded Mentoring: From Mimicry to Increased Independence**

Connected to the advocacy role are CTs’ diverse views regarding their roles as teacher educators. Valencia et al. describe the variety of roles CTs play in terms of helping candidates learn to teach. Mimesis falls at one end of the spectrum, with CTs who “believed that the role of the student teacher was to learn by following him precisely rather than to experiment with a range of pedagogical tools” (2009, p. 310). In the middle of the continuum is “grounded experimentation”

in which the candidate and CT co-plan and conference regularly about the candidate's teaching performance, which the CT consistently observes (p. 310). Finally, at the far end of the spectrum is the sink or swim approach in which the CT allows the candidate to plan and teach completely independently and offers little to no feedback on the candidate's teaching performance because he/she is not in the classroom to observe it (p. 311).

Current teaching candidate Ellen articulated the benefits of mimicking the teaching styles of her English and social studies CTs:

Ellen: [My CTs have] two totally different styles—and I did find myself mimicking their style. Both of them said, do what you want, you know, we want you to do your own lesson plans and kind of do your own thing. But when I did that, I felt [like they really meant], well, here's what you probably *should* do, you know, and then I was pulled back into their style. And so I just naturally over a month or so just started doing more their style. And I don't think it hurt me because they were different, and I got to do two different styles, one of which would have been closer to my own style. Had I just had the experience of the opposite style of mine, it might have been a little frustrating.

In my observations of Ellen's teaching toward the end of the semester, I observed her mimicry of her CT's style when I noticed Ellen saying "good job" to students as she monitored their 15-20 minutes of silent reading time. As I observed, I thought it was strange to "interrupt" the silence with these words of encouragement (although the students didn't seem to mind), and I asked Ellen about it during our post-observation conference, which her CT was unable to attend. She responded that she thought it was weird too, at first, when she observed her CT doing it, but that she had gradually picked up his mannerisms and words of encouragement during silent reading—although she claims that she doesn't say it as often as he does.

Current teaching candidate Ellen also described the freedom she felt in one CT's sink or swim approach to mentoring:

Ellen: The sink or swim – I did have a good portion of that experience in one classroom, and, you know, I kind of liked it just because when I was allowed to, like, okay now he's really gone, so we're going to arrange the desks a little differently, and we're going to do this. So I did like that approach.

It is important to note that Ellen was a strong candidate, and the liberation she experienced when her CT left the classroom and allowed her to "swim," would have likely been viewed in a less positive light by a weaker candidate left to "sink."

Recent graduate and current middle school English teacher Amy viewed the three mentoring philosophies as a scaffolded approach, which she connected to her own student teaching experience the previous year.

Amy: It's almost scaffolding. As in what I did was mimicking my CT. Getting up there I can see what she does. I'm going to do kind of the same thing to get comfortable with the kids. I'm not just going to throw them off balance. As they got used to me, [my CT and I]

would plan together, we'd meet, we'd figure out, what am I going to start teaching, kind of doing the grounded experimentation. We'd plan together, do what we agree upon. And then I guess we had two weeks where we had to do something ourselves – it was my main idea, what I want to do. And she helped me think of other things, and we put it together. Basically, those two weeks, she's like okay, now here's your class. It's all yours, and [students] knew me by then, and I guess that's kind of where you can sink or swim. Basically having those levels where you can take that step to do it. That's the best way. Because just throwing them out there, without anything, nothing's going to come out of that.

Barbara shared her philosophy of mentoring and noted that her own students appreciate the change in teaching styles, from her own to her candidate's:

Barbara: It's important to realize that student teachers come in, and they watch, and we have those conversations later, and they want to know if they should teach like me. It's like, no. You've got to find what works for you because what works for me may not work for you. These are just different traits that you can pick up, leave alone, change to make it you, but I don't expect them—and the students don't expect them—to be like me. I think the students like that change.

Ellen, Denise, and Christine engaged in a lengthy conversation (excerpted here) related to the different mentoring styles and how they can affect candidates' confidence:

Ellen: And real quick, where it says one can lose confidence in their own abilities ... trying to meet CT's expectations – that goes along with how I felt about the whole mimicry thing. You know, I'm learning all these things at [the university] that I want to try out in the classroom. Then when I sort of infuse those things into the in lesson plan, and it was suggested [by my CTs] to do something different, I sort of stopped trying some of those things that I learned. When you are planning a lesson and you plan it from the beginning, and it's your baby or whatever, I think you teach it better. I know myself, and when I started to try to conform to what I thought my CT wanted, that's where I started to not do as well. As long as you're collaborating though, I think it works better as far as, what do you want me to cover, and then how do *you* [the candidate] want to teach it, rather than [the CT saying] maybe you should present it like this, because then I didn't feel like I could express myself. I didn't feel like I performed as well.

Christine: Well, you don't have the buy in. Just like our students, they need to buy in order to care about what they're doing.

Denise: I wonder if we might be able to have some professional development related to some of the new things that your students are learning [at the university] and wanting to apply in the classroom. What are the best practices that are being discussed, so that we're familiar with that. Maybe CTs who need the [seats in] rows are not willing to let go for a reason. If they see that this is the research behind the strategy, they might be more willing to allow candidates to experiment. So maybe giving us a little more time to soak it in and

say, oh that sounds good. Sometimes we have a tendency to believe that they're not learning best practices, that it's all theory. We need to bridge that gap.

Ellen: I was told that I needed to be re-trained. [My CT] felt like he was re-training me for the real world. In some cases, I did feel that he was right about that. There were some things that I tried the way I was taught and it wouldn't have worked in our classroom, in our school, so I see where you're coming with that.

Denise: The whole idea is, everyone should be learning from this. I'm not the brilliant all-knowing one, and let me bestow upon you [the candidate] the best way to handle this—look at what I've done, look at what I do. No. You [the candidate] are sharing with me and I'm learning. I'm sharing with you, and you're learning, but all for the benefit of these kids who are learning and who are going to teach us some things.

And, I would argue, the US learns from the partnership as well. As a US and program chair, I benefit from observations of candidates because they allow me to keep my foot in the door of middle/secondary English classrooms and to take those experiences back to my methods courses where I can more thoroughly prepare students to meet the demands of the urban district with which we have partnered, helping them develop methods and strategies that they can apply in their field experiences and to their careers. It also allows me to assess my program, as I observe candidates' planning and teaching performances. I can see where their strengths and weaknesses lie, analyze those alongside other program assessment data, and determine areas for improvement within my program and curriculum.

### **Limitations**

All focus group participants were effective CTs (with strong pedagogical content knowledge and mentoring skills) and successful candidates (who earned above average scores in observation evaluations and course work), eliminating the possibility of exploring the perspectives of CTs and candidates who struggled in their roles as mentors and mentees/teacher candidates.

### **New Understandings and Next Steps**

As I consider what I have learned from my English candidates and colleagues through these focus groups, I look forward to continued exploration of the following issues and practices in my program chair and supervisory roles:

**Making my role as advocate and gatekeeper explicit to my candidates.** Prior to the start of their final year-long teaching internship, I have begun explaining to my candidates that I am their advocate as long as they are meeting expectations in terms of professional dispositions, instructional design, teaching performance, receptivity to feedback, etc. As soon as they stop meeting expectations, my role moves toward that of a gatekeeper as I must also advocate for the P-12 students and CTs (and the reputation of my English Education Program)—ensuring that their interests are not being sacrificed due to the shortcomings of the candidate. Usually, the partnership is mutually beneficial for the candidate, CT, and P-12 students, but in rare instances it is not—and candidates need to be aware up front that my role shifts depending on their performance in the field.

**Intentionally discussing and critiquing candidates’ pedagogical content knowledge during post-observation conferences.** At times I have found myself reluctant to offer critical feedback on a candidate’s pedagogical content knowledge out of fear that I may inadvertently offend the CT (e.g., if the candidate is teaching from the CT’s materials/instructional design). In fact, I have begun inquiring with the candidate and CT during our conference to determine who designed the materials and instruction, so I can determine how much of a hand the CT had in it. If the CT’s influence is significant, I take that into consideration as I pose questions to help the candidate reconsider their instructional design, delivery, and assessment of students’ deep understanding of important content. Interestingly, I have found that CTs may be just as eager to discuss candidate pedagogical content knowledge but are waiting for an opening from the US.

Recently, I observed a candidate who did not articulate clear goals for student understanding in her plans (or her delivery) and who seemed to be integrating literacy strategies willy-nilly into her instructional design with no rationale for their inclusion. The students sensed the lack of purpose in a lesson that felt more like a bunch of tasks to complete than fluidly connected learning activities with a clear trajectory toward deep understanding. When I visited with the CT briefly before she had to excuse herself for another meeting, she focused on classroom management as the candidate’s weakness while I nodded and took notes. I then conferred with the candidate while the CT attended another meeting (not ideal, but that’s how it works out sometimes), and we discussed instructional design. When I inquired why she had integrated specific literacy strategies into her lesson, the candidate responded she had just “found them in a book” and decided to use them, without a clear understanding of the strategies’ purposes.

When I relayed this troubling news to the CT a short while later, the CT was eager to discuss her observations of the candidate’s instructional design. This made me wonder, do CTs and USs avoid conversations about candidate content and pedagogical knowledge because we’re worried about offending the other? Do we stick with classroom management because it’s “safer” and easier to see—like conventions in writing? Perhaps the CT was worried about offending me with her observations because she assumed that I’d instructed the candidate to use literacy strategies without consideration of purpose and student learning. This is an area I want to continue to explore in my own practice and research.

**Bridging the perceived gap from theory to practice.** I noted CT Denise’s concern that “sometimes [practicing teachers] have a tendency to believe that [teaching candidates] are not learning best practices, that it’s all theory.” I’ve begun placing teaching candidates with graduates of my program—one of the benefits of having been in my current position for ten years. Fortunately, my graduates enthusiastically volunteer to serve as CTs. Because they are familiar with the sequence of field experiences and the program’s philosophy on reading, writing, language, and literacy instruction, the transition for teaching candidates in those classrooms is not as challenging as it might be in a classroom where the CT’s approach is in direct conflict with what the candidates experience in their university program. In fact, I’ve found over the years that as I am able to place more of my candidates in classrooms of CTs who are familiar with my program—either because they graduated from it or because they have served as a CT for a number of years—my candidates have fewer concerns/complaints about the CTs teaching/mentoring style, and instead worry about less challenging issues like logistics (e.g., deadlines, video-recording their teaching) and professionalism (e.g., how to communicate

questions/concerns to their CT in an appropriate manner). This lightens their load considerably as they find that their CTs are more than happy to co-plan and co-teach with them—and allow them to experiment with instructional methods they are learning at the university. This area continues to warrant attention as novice teachers regularly fall into the trap of giving up on research-based techniques due to perceived failure, rather than critically assessing their own implementation of them.

**Directly addressing the uncooperative cooperating teacher.** Every few years or so, a new CT (never affiliated with my program) will communicate significant philosophical disagreements with my program’s preparation of teachers not to me, but to their teaching candidate. Similar to Ellen’s reporting that her CT told her she “needed to be re-trained,” the teaching candidate will approach me after class and say something like, “My CT told me this program is not preparing me for the real world.” This kind of language and behavior does not communicate a strong partnership between the university and the CT. To remedy this, I have reached out to those handful of CTs over the years to invite them to share their concerns about the program and the field experience requirements with me—and make suggestions for improvement. This is in addition to feedback I solicit from my Program Advisory Council which reviews assessment data and helps me engage in continuous program improvement. Unfortunately, of those few CTs who have complained about the program to their teaching candidates (who then anxiously report back to me) most have declined opportunities to provide constructive feedback, and I have instead avoided placing future teaching candidates with them—and on a few occasions located new placements mid-semester when I learn about such mismatches early enough.

**Strategic sharing of mentoring resources.** The CTs who mentor in my program are busy and receive almost no compensation for mentoring candidates, their only incentive being the knowledge that they are sustaining the profession. Additionally, many of my CTs are not interested or able to participate in professional development (PD) related to mentoring, and so I have begun providing “just in time” assistance and resources:

1. At our English teaching internship kick-off meetings for CTs, USs, and candidates, I set aside time for all participants to view a teaching video and then use our evaluation tool to score and provide feedback for the teacher, which we then discuss and compile. CTs earned PD points toward re-licensure for their participation.
2. During a recent semester, I shared Jennifer Ritter’s (2009) essay “Working with Student Teachers” with a new CT who was mentoring a struggling candidate. In the article, Ritter describes the “surreal” feeling of observing someone else in her own classroom, as well as her strategies for working with a struggling student teacher by giving him weekly challenges. After reading this article, the CT appeared to have a better understanding of how to provide support for his candidate and how and when to communicate feedback to the candidate and to me, both in writing and during face-to-face conferences. The candidate, in turn, showed improvement not only in his preparation and instruction but also in his confidence.
3. I have also shared Stan Yanchus’s (2010) commentary on evolving metaphors for the CT-candidate partnership with candidates and CTs at the start of each student teaching semester. In this essay, Yanchus describes his shifting perspective on his and his student teacher’s roles in impacting student learning. Rather than directing his student teacher on the “what” of his teaching (i.e., what texts students will be reading and what teaching

methods they will use), he focuses on the how and why through professional readings that provide a rationale for his methods and curricular decisions. In addition, Yanchus allows his student teachers more flexibility and space to bring their own learning and professional development to the table in terms of curriculum design.

### Final Thoughts

I recognize that it takes time to develop partnerships that will enhance my candidates' and P12 students' learning, and I agree with Denise that "everyone should be learning from this" as we hold candidates to high standards while also supporting their efforts to experiment with and critically assess their English language arts pedagogy. As I develop my own mentoring skills as a teacher educator and university supervisor, I will continue to seek out feedback and learn from my candidates, graduates, cooperating teachers, and other colleagues as we work together to improve the mentor partnerships we have already established—and build new partnerships.

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## Appendix A

### Focus Group Agenda

#### Refreshments

#### Consent Forms

- Please note that the conversation will be video-recorded but that only I will view the recording, as I transcribe the conversation.

#### A Note about Confidentiality

- Participants in this study include current candidates, recent graduates, and cooperating teachers. I, too, am a participant, since I have served as a faculty member and university supervisor. My hope is that you will feel comfortable being honest (and respectful) while sharing your perspectives, knowing that our conversation will not go beyond this room—except, perhaps, in a professional publication in which I will use pseudonyms.
- Current candidates: please know that your responses in this focus group will NOT affect your grades this semester.
- It is only natural that during this conversation you will make connections to your own experiences as a mentor or mentee (or both). Please do share your experiences and stories, but please *refrain from naming the people* in your stories.

#### Introductions

- First names only
- Role: Candidate, Recent graduate (teaching status), Cooperating teacher
- You can choose how much additional information you'd like to share (e.g., name of school, etc.)

#### Focus Group Discussion Protocol

- Prompts and research = food for thought → Not intended to restrict the conversation
- Go where you want
- Talk to one another; I may or may not participate; just ignore me if I'm listening and taking notes on my computer

*Thank you for your time, honesty, and energy today!*

## Appendix B

### **Focus Group Prompts/Discussion Starters**

Topic: Attributes of Effective Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors

1. Comments about Valencia et al. article summary
2. Should university faculty and supervisors continue to serve as mentors for teacher education candidates after they graduate? If so, how? What would be most helpful?
  - a. What about cooperating teachers?
3. Can university supervisors provide too much feedback? How much is too much?
  - a. What about cooperating teachers?
4. Should university supervisors for English Education candidates have knowledge of English content and how to teach it? Why or why not?
5. What do you think about the dual role of university supervisors and cooperating teachers—advocates and gatekeepers? What message does this send to candidates? At what point, if ever, do we stop teaching/advocating and tell candidates “you’re not cutting it/you’re done”?
6. What do you think about candidates who are placed in the same school being required to observe one another and provide feedback (peer review of teaching)?
7. What kinds of training/professional development do university supervisors and cooperating teachers need to be more effective mentors for candidates?
  - a. Candidates: what do you wish your supervisor/CT had done better or differently? Or what did they do well that other supervisors/CTs should emulate?